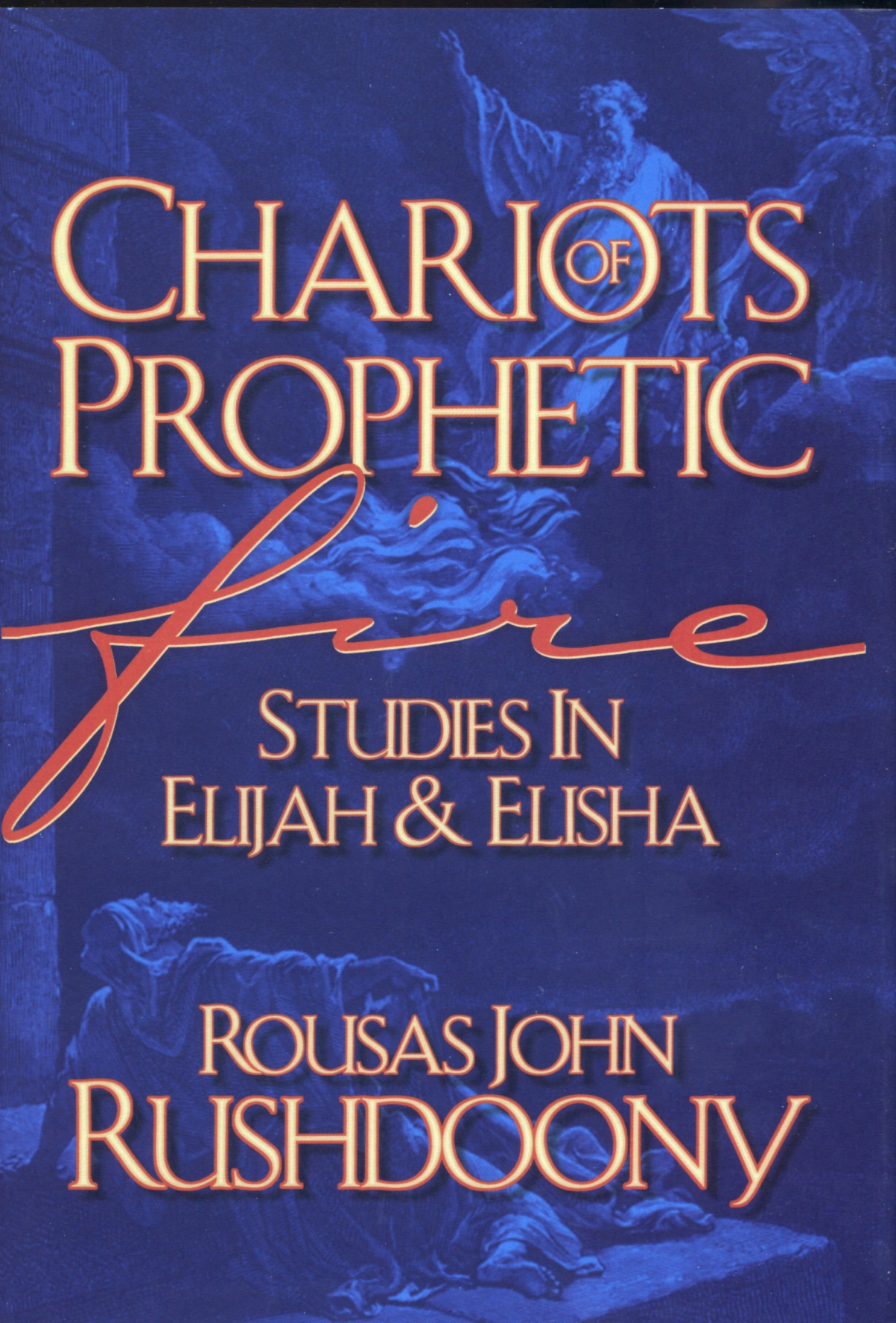
CHARIOTS OF PROPHETIC fire
STUDIES IN ELIJAH & ELISHA
ROUSAS JOHN RUSHDOONY

Chariots of Prophetic Fire

Studies in Elijah & Elisha

Rousas John Rushdoony

VALLECITO, CALIFORNIA

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In loving memory of our parents,

Dr. Ivan Rae Bierly
and
Margaret Dickman Bierly,

two devout Christians who spent their lives
dedicated to God and His Word.

Susan Bierly-Craig
Karen Bierly Wandel
Leon Rae Bierly

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Chapter 1
The Living God

> And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. (1 Kings 17:1)

There is a strangeness about Elijah, and a remoteness. A fierce and lonely figure, he appears in history without introduction and with no mention of his family. We are given the name of Elisha's father, and Isaiah's, Jeremiah's, Ezekiel's, and others, but not Elijah's. It is as if Elijah is totally cut off from his family and separated unto the Lord. We are told only that he is a Tishbite from Gilead, to distinguish his home from the Tishbe or Thisbe in Naphtali. Elijah's home area was sparsely settled, rocky, and wild.

However, it is easy to see a marked resemblance between our time and Elijah's, and between the work of a faithful pastor today and Elijah's calling. Elijah's was a time of judgment; ours is as well. But there is a deeper resemblance. Elijah's day was an age of *syncretism*, of radical compromise between the worship of the Lord and Baal worship. The two had been blended together to make one religion, so that a refusal to see the necessity for uncompromising religion marked Israel.

This was nothing new. At the very birth of Israel, Jeroboam insisted on the unity of Baal worship and the faith of Jehovah (1 Kings 12:25-33). Israel rarely denied the Lord or professed open apostasy. Rather, it pursued a course of religious syncretism, using the name of the Lord but absorbing with their religion whatever other faith was expedient for them. Thus, they were not open pagans, but pagans who practiced their unbelief under cover of the Lord's name.

Syncretism is again our problem. The Baalim were *lords*, other forces, powers, and persons who were accorded sovereignty over man. Today, Baal-worship is again prevalent in the name of the Lord. Humanistic statism is easily and

readily submitted to by churchmen: children are placed in humanistic state schools, given into the hands of the enemies of God, and people are only indignant if you condemn this practice. The major concern of most church members is not the Lord's battles, nor the urgency to make a stand against compromise, but, "How can I best enjoy life?"

The similarity does not end there. Ahab's day was one of prosperity, a false prosperity that was largely the product of inflation. Ahab had inherited a strong realm from his father Omri, who had pursued syncretism on the one hand, and financially advantageous alliances on the other. Ahab married a Phoenician princess, Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians (1 Kings 16:31). This placed him in a favored position with a wealthy merchant state. Our age, too, has been marked by an inflationary prosperity, and the loosening of moral and religious standards is one result. People want *things*, not *qualities* or *virtues*. Some Puritan autobiographies tell us of men's despair over their sins; now, despair is commonplace because people *lack things*. On all sides, men speak, after President Kennedy, of "the revolution of rising expectations." This revolution demands more material wealth for all men and diminishes the need for moral and educational performance and excellence. It is now a virtue to tolerate evil and to be intolerant of any material lack for man.

Elijah steps into this prosperous scene like John the Baptist in a similar situation centuries later, a desert man proclaiming judgment to an age unwilling to hear anything but promises of more material wealth.

Elijah had apparently confronted Ahab before. James 5:17 tells us that Elijah prayed for the drought, and God heard his prayer:

> 16. ...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.
> 17. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

> 18. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. (James 5:16-18)

Elijah had prayed in terms of God's revealed word, which very plainly speaks of drought as a judgment on sin:

> 18. And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.
> 19. And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass.
> (Lev. 26:18-19)

> 16. Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them;
> 17. And then the LORD'S wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you.
> (Deut. 11:16-17)

> 23. And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron.
> 24. The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed. (Deut. 28:23-24)

Solomon also refers to this fact of drought as judgment in 1 Kings 8:35.

In this situation, Israel added to her sins by following Jezebel and her priests. It would be a serious error to place the burden of guilt on Jezebel. The Bible clearly blames Ahab: the responsibility was his (1 Kings 16:30-33). Moreover, the people were no less guilty: they loved compromise and refused Elijah's summons to stand with him and the Lord (1 Kings 18:21). The Jezebels of history must bear their own sins; we cannot lay ours upon them also. The essence of true faith is the humble confession of our personal responsibility for sin, to say with David:

> 3. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

> 4. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. (Ps. 51:3-4)

If the sin of Israel had been *only* the sin of Ahab and Jezebel, God's judgment would have struck them alone. We know, of course, that judgment did come to Ahab's house (1 Kings 20:20-43), in a fearful way (2 Kings 9:22-37), but eventually judgment and captivity also came to all of Israel. And, for the present, the drought was a judgment on all, from Ahab to the simplest Israelite.

When does judgment come? Our Lord tells us how, in *every* age from Noah's day to the Second Coming, judgment comes:

> 37. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.
> 38. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,
> 39. And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.
> (Matt. 24:37-39)

These words primarily apply to our Lord's judgment on Jerusalem and Judea, and the Jewish-Roman War of A.D. 66-70. They also apply to *every time of judgment.* Why?

Our Lord tells us, *first,* that such men see nothing in history but natural processes, the daily affairs of life. God is remote and unreal, and history is a process determined by man. History is seen as man's affair, and man feels that he is firmly in charge. Whatever religious profession men may make, they act as natural humanists and see their personal and national lives as determined by nature and man.

Second, whatever their religious profession, men in such an age imply that God is either dead or very far away and indifferent. God's "intervention" in history is in the ancient past; the present is determined by very natural processes. In short, there is no belief in the total and providential government by God the Lord. We have an implicit "God is dead" religion.

Into this situation God sends Elijah with the declaration: a long drought is coming. Elijah's word is to the point: "As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Three things stand out in this proclamation. *First*, of course, a total drought is declared, neither dew nor rain. *Second*, Elijah declares God to be the living God: "As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand." The remote or dead God is suddenly very much alive in judgment! Elijah *stands* before God as His servant, to be sent out as His messenger at God's command. He stands before the King of Kings as His courier, to go forth on the Lord's orders to proclaim His judgments. Elijah here, and in 1 Kings 18:15, declares himself to be a throne-man, one who comes from before the Great King at His command. Later, Elisha, to make it clear that he indeed wears Elijah's mantle as the throne-man, makes the same statement (2 Kings 3:14). If we believe that God is remote, then we are like Ahab's people, half-humanists and half–hypocritical churchmen. The living God is never remote: He is closer to us than we are to ourselves. He is the living God, before whom all things are naked and open to His sight, "unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13). We are *never* more face-to-face with anything than the living God.

Third, Elijah declares, on God's command, "there shall not be dew nor rain these years, *but according to my word.*" Keil's comment on this is to the point:

> Elijah thereby describes himself as one into whose power the God of Israel has given up the idolatrous king and his people. In Jas. V. 17-18, this act of Elijah is ascribed to the power of his prayers, since Elijah "was also a man such as we are," inasmuch as the prophets received their power to work solely through faith and intercourse with God in prayer, and faith gives power to remove mountains.[1]

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[1] C.F. Keil, "The Book of the Kings" in C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1950), 235f.

We meet God face to face in every event, and in the most secret hiding place of our lives. We also meet Him in His Elijahs who, "according to (His) word," set forth His judgments, His law, His grace, and His word to every generation. He is the inescapable God. Elijah is now dead, but the God of Elijah lives, "able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matt. 3:9), or Elijahs to go forth at His command.

We have had a worldwide drought, and we may have more. We have had, even worse, "leanness" of soul as a judgment (Ps. 106:15). Elijah (whose name means *Jehovah is my God*) tells us that God lives, and His judgments are total ones. The question is, then, God lives, but shall we?

> 14. But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.
> 15. See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil.... (Deut. 30:14-15)

> 19. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live;
> 20. That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days.... (Deut. 30:19-20)

Chapter 2
Baalism and the Lord

2. And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying,
3. Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.
4. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.
5. So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.
6. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.
7. And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.
(1 Kings 17:2-7)

This text is highly offensive to modern man; it is also embarrassing to many churchmen. Why? Using modern terminology, we would have to say that the offense lies in 'the obvious and crude supernaturalism' of the passage. Using Biblical language, however, we would have to say that the offense truly lies in our modern Baalism, for we are in Adam Baal-worshippers.

What is Baalism? Baalism was every form of naturalistic religion. All power and authority were derived from naturalistic processes. Hence, the state or the ruler could be the Baal or lord, as in Molech worship. The Baal could also be the husband, the sun, moon, and stars, or any other natural and determining force in nature and history. In Baal-worship, there was a ready syncretism and change from one "good" to another, as history saw the victory of one power over another. The only criterion or standard was thus *history*; the moral force was the triumphant and ruling force. *Morality was thus born out of natural power.* When Mao Tse-tung declared that political power and authority are born out of a gun barrel, he spoke from a heart of Baal-worship. Pragmatism, naturalism,

and existentialism are simply modern forms of ancient Baalism.

Baal means master, lord, owner, husband, or possessor. Baalism usurped the prerogatives of God and ascribed them to natural forces. Today, as in ancient Israel, we see power as residing in men, states, and nature. We look more fearfully to the power of Washington, D.C., and Moscow than to the power of the Lord. When we do so, we are Baal-worshippers.

A characteristic Old Testament word used by the prophets against Baalism is *mishpat* or righteousness, justice. As against every naturalistic and historical power or force, the Lord God of Hosts sets forth His law as the governing word, and as a judgment on all creation. It is not the king whose word is law, but God whose every word man must live by (Matt. 4:4) and whose word is law over all creation. Truth and morality, say the pragmatists, are whatever works. For the existentialists, they are the will of autonomous man. For Scripture, truth, law, and morality are what God the Lord declares them to be.

Mishpat thus is God's righteousness in judgment on this world. When Asaph sings of promotion, to make high, *i.e.*, to exalt because of godliness and righteousness, he declares:

> 6. For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south.
> 7. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.
> 8. For in the land of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them. (Ps. 75:6-8)

It is the essence of Baalism to say that ultimacy and final authority rest somewhere among men, history, or nature, or in combinations thereof. As against this, Jeremiah prays:

> 23. O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.
> 24. O LORD, correct me, but with justice; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing. (Jer. 10:23-24)

The ultimate and the basic form of "supernaturalism" and condemnation of Baalism is God's total and providential government of all things. The Lord God manifests His condemnation and confounding of Baalism by means of a drought. He announces this drought through Elijah, so that no man can be in doubt as to the source of the judgment. It is not nature which produces the drought, but God the Lord *totally* commanding all natural forces which brings the drought. The drought brings judgment on man, history, and nature. The earth is cursed for man's sake (Gen. 3:17-19), even as faith and obedience it is blessed (Deut. 28:1-14). God cut man off from the tree of life (Gen. 3:22-24), and, in every age, God gives man a shaky foundation in time and nature, for we are told of the earth that God "hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods" (Ps. 24:2). Moses, meditating on these things, said, "Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men" (Ps. 90:3).

At the brook Cherith, until, with the drought, the stream went dry, Elijah was fed by the ravens. Wallace said of this, "In the ultimate issue of things he would know that he did not depend upon man, and he would be upheld and sustained by his relation to God Himself."[1] Keil's comments were also excellent:

> Through this miracle, which unbelievers reject, because they do not acknowledge a living God, by whom, as the Creator and Lord of all creatures, even the voracious ravens are made subservient to His plans of salvation, Elijah was not only cut off from intercourse with men, who might have betrayed his place of abode to the king, but was mightily strengthened himself, through the confidence inspired in the almighty assistance of his God, for his approaching contests with the worshippers of idols, and for the privations and sufferings which awaited him in the fulfillment of his vocation.[2]

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[1] Ronald S. Wallace, *Elijah and Elisha, Expositions from the Book of Kings* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1957), 11.

[2] C. F. Keil, *op. cit.*, 236f.

The offense of this text, and of the life of Elijah, is apparent in this miraculous feeding. The attitude of many is frank cynicism about so "simple-minded" a story. Many churchmen find it painful and embarrassing as well. If God intended to work a miracle, they feel, why not one with more dignity? Feeding a man by means of ravens sounds preposterous to them. Why did not God use more natural means?

The miracles of Scripture are for the most part grouped around confrontations between belief and unbelief. The conflict with Pharaoh is an example, as is God's witness to an unbelieving generation in the wilderness. Baalism was a religion of process and continuity, stressing natural and historical ultimacy and development. *The focal point of power was for Baalism the focal point of truth.* (Stalin once asked cynically, how many military divisions the pope had, and Roman Catholicism is indeed a like faith.) In Molech worship, the king is a god. This was no less true of the pharaohs. Now, in contempt of all this, God shows His absolute power by using ravens to feed His throne-servant Elijah. Into the hands of that seemingly helpless man, God the Lord places the key to His judgment: "there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word," that is, Elijah's word. To despise Elijah was to despise the Lord. Later, when children despised Elisha, God took it as an offense against His own person and destroyed them (2 Kings 2:23-24). The psalmist says of God's appointed men,

> 14. He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproved kings for their sakes;
> 15. Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm. (Ps. 105:14-15)

Our Lord says, "That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36). In our loose and sharp-tongued age, it is hard for us to remember this prospect and certainty of judgment on every "idle word," and the very great judgment against the words spoken against God's servants, but they are no less real.

In this miraculous feeding, God shows His contempt for Baalism. If we are embarrassed by this miracle, it is because of our Baalish heart; we had better beware, lest God in judgment show Himself embarrassed by us. God uses what to men are contemptible means, in order to manifest His contempt for the arrogance of Baalism or humanism.

Let us purge out the old leaven of humanism, lest we be purged out of His house by the Lord (1 Cor. 5:7). Remember, too, it was not Ahab, but Elijah whom the Lord sustained and fed.

Chapter 3

The School of the Prophet

> 8. And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,
> 9. Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. (1 Kings 17:8-9)

When God sent Elijah to stay with the widow of Zarephath, it was a blessed fact that no presbytery, bishop, or church was in charge of Elijah's work, or else he would have been told that such an arrangement could only cause talk and create a scandal for the faith! Too many churchmen have a strong nose for suspicion and weak hands for action. For the comfort of suspicious minds, perhaps we should begin by calling attention to the very circumspect arrangements! The widow, while now desperately poor and near starvation, had a good home. It had a strong, flat roof, with a room or loft on that roof with an outside staircase. When Elijah wanted to go into the house proper, he had to descend from his room by an outside staircase and go to the doorway of the house (see 1 Kings 17:19, 23). In brief, to use modern terms, he had a separate apartment in the same building, although he ate below with the widow and her son.

The widow was a young woman; her son was young enough for her to cradle him in her arms (1 Kings 17:19). She was a believer in the Lord, and perhaps for this reason had none to help her, neither her own family, nor her in-laws. A religious separation made one as good as dead.

When Elijah appears, she is near starvation, preparing, with the meager food remaining, one final meal for her son and herself. Wallace aptly stated the situation:

> When Elijah arrived at the home of the poor widow woman at Zarephath he must have been taken aback when God said, 'Here is the widow whom I have commanded to sustain thee!' She was at the point of death. She was

> gathering sticks for what she feared would be the last meal she and her son could ever hope for on this earth.[1]

Of this widow it must be said, *first*, that she was a foreigner, a Zidonian, not a Hebrew. Our Lord stresses this fact by calling attention to her faith (Luke 4:25-27). Elijah, for his own safety from Ahab's wrath, was sent by God to a foreign land, and to a foreign woman. *Second*, while a foreigner, the widow was a strong believer. She uses the name of God, *Jehovah*, and speaks of Him as the living God. The fact that she refers to God as "the LORD *thy* God" in speaking to Elijah does not mean a lack of faith on her part (1 Kings 18:10). The prophet was the throne-man, and the widow's form of address is respectful of that fact: the prophet is seen in a mediating role.

Third, because she believed in the Lord, she honored His prophet. 1 Kings 17:10-16 reads:

> 10. So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.
> 11. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.
> 12. And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.
> 13. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not: go and do as thou hast said; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.
> 14. For thus said the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.
> 15. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house did eat many days.
> 16. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

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[1] Wallace, *op. cit.*, 18f.

It is amazing that commentators, writing from the ease of a professional chair, have actually held that this widow was not a converted woman until after the resurrection of her son! They apparently cannot recognize faith when they stumble over it, or when God presents it in His word. Elijah was a wanted man; God gave Elijah a safe hiding-place with a woman of great faith.

Fourth, the widow was obviously a believer who took God's laws of hospitality and tithing very seriously. Although facing starvation, she gave God's portion to His prophet, and she gave the Lord His portion first. Because modern man is usually required to tithe from a paycheck, he forgets that men once tithed the firstfruits and gave the Lord all His tithes and offerings *before* they touched their harvest. Also, in terms of the laws of hospitality, a good host fed his guests *before* he himself ate, making sure first that the weary travelers had all they wanted. We see Abraham standing by, to wait on his guests, as an example of this (Gen. 18:8).

How many theologians, professors, pastors, and churchmen can match this widow's faith? How many would give their last meal to God's servant, let alone harbor a wanted man? Only the blind can fail to see the widow's faith.

But disaster struck. The widow's son became very ill and died. His "soul," or, literally, *life,* left him:

> 17. And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick: and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him.
> 18. And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee,
> 19. O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?
> 20. And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed.
> 21. And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, has thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?

21. And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again.
22. And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.
23. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: And Elijah said, See, thy son liveth.
24. And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth. (1 Kings 17:17-24)

It must be noted, *first*, that this is the second miracle in the widow's house, both amazing ones, and both private, not public. The unfailing supply of food and now the resurrection of the child give us two of the greatest miracles of Scripture, and both are private. Why?

Second, while we can see the blessing in both miracles for the widow, let us remember the meaning of the resurrection for Elijah. This was the third miracle in his life, the first being the feeding by the ravens. The Lord was preparing Elijah, instilling the confidence he would need later when he must publicly confront Ahab's forces on Mt. Carmel. All of Scripture makes it clear that it was not easy to be a prophet of the Lord. The prophets of Baal appealed to natural forces and events; the prophets of the Lord pointed to a supernatural determination. Their word went against the grain with all the sons of Adam.

Third, some commentators make much of the widow's rash outcry in grief. We who in our day are so much more prone to cry even more rashly under minor annoyances are in no moral position to condemn her. Certainly, Elijah did not. He directed his words to God in prayer, and God heard Elijah.

The Lord at Zarephath preserves a godly widow, whose very name we do not know, and trains a prophet for the great confrontation with Baalism. In three miracles, Elijah sees God work against the heart of Baalism, the belief in historical and natural processes as ultimate. A line which sums up this dramatic role whereby God confounds man's Baalish heart is Zechariah 14:7, "at evening time it shall be light." Only the

Lord can bring this to pass. He can make the sinner a new creation, the dead to live, and the sun to stand still. "Is any thing too hard for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:14).

One further note: God's concern through Elijah is the covenant nation, but He is still mindful of a foreign widow. He *precedes* Elijah: "I have *commanded* a woman." He is the God who goes before us. Nothing escapes Him and His care. He declares that He will not even break a bruised reed (Isa. 42:2) heedlessly, but will bring forth justice in all its ramifications.

Chapter 4

The Summons

1. And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.
2. And Elijah went to shew himself to Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria.
3. And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly:
4. For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.)
5. And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts.
6. So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.
7. And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah?
8. And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.
9. And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me?
10. As the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there, he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not.
11. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.
12. And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the LORD shall carry thee wither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth.
13. Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the LORD, how I hid an hundred men of

> the LORD's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water?
> 14. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me.
> 15. And Elijah said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day.
> 16. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah. (1 Kings 18:1-16)

Before coming to the key point in this text, some relevant aspects of it need to be considered. *First*, Obadiah makes a poor impression at first glance. His fearfulness on being confronted by Elijah has usually left him wanting in the eyes of many commentators and preachers. As we shall see later, there was good reason for Obadiah's fearfulness. Obadiah first of all greeted Elijah with respect and awe, falling prostrate before him as before a king. Obadiah, whose name means "servant of the Lord," or of God, did so because he recognized Elijah as God's throne-man. His fearfulness is not manifested *until* Elijah commands him to go to Ahab with the summons, "Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here."

We are also forewarned against being critical of Obadiah in vv. 3-4, where Obadiah's rescue and protection of 100 sons of the prophets, faithful proclaimers of God's law (Israel's Bible of that day), is set forth by God's inspiration. The Lord commends Obadiah: who are we to be critical of him against the Lord's judgment?

Second, we are told that Ahab and Obadiah went out together, without others, to divide the land between them in their search for water and pasture for the royal horses and mules. Some have used this to imply that Ahab's court was a simple and primitive one. Others have held that no doubt a retinue accompanied both men, although we are told that each searched "by himself." Israel was a wealthy state, and the court of the house of Omri was far from poor or meager. Another reason guided this course of action. I recall being told the story of a wealthy sheep man in the western inter-mountain area who had established his business in the early 1940s. A native of

the area, he knew almost every nook and cranny of the mountains as few did. When the drought of the 1980s made his situation desperate, he went alone into the mountains to find an untouched range with an intact water source and then led his herder to that range without telling him or anyone else where they were going. Israel was full of dying livestock. Had Ahab taken a retinue, any surviving range would have been quickly preempted by desperate men, anxious to save something of their herds. Then, by the time Ahab returned to Samaria and had his livestock driven to the range, nothing would have been left.

Third, in this quest, Ahab trusted only Obadiah. This should not surprise us. Often in antiquity, tyrants turned to godly men for men and material in governing their realms. The Mongol Khans used Christians extensively while rejecting the faith. Nebuchadnezzar and Darius used Daniel. Nero used Christians in his household or cabinet (Phil. 4:22). Ahab was no doubt cognizant of Obadiah's ability and character and plainly relied on him.

But, *fourth*, the key fact in this text is Elijah's summons, issued to Obadiah, "Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here." We cannot understand Obadiah's shocked, fearful reaction unless we understand what this means. Because our age has lost all sense of form and ceremony, the meaning of this declaration tends to escape us. We can, perhaps, grasp a small fragment of its meaning, if we imagine a child ordering a high-ranking executive assistant to his father to demand that his father present himself for an audience.

A king in antiquity had authority and power of a religious nature. No man could order a king to come to him, nor could any man present himself to a king at will. He came and went at the king's word. In Persia, any who dared to approach the king without his command risked death (Esther 4:11). This was law among the Persians; it was a common and general practice elsewhere.

To proclaim the judgment of drought, Elijah had made an unannounced appearance before Ahab (1 Kings 17:1). Perhaps the shocked unbelief with which his proclamation was received enabled Elijah leave to escape before the amazed Ahab could react. Certainly, soon thereafter, the search was under way to capture and kill the audacious prophet (1 Kings 18:10f).

Elijah knew that Obadiah would neither kill him on sight nor arrest him. It was dangerous enough for Obadiah to do neither. Now he is asked to go to Ahab, as though Ahab were a simple peasant, and summon Ahab to an audience with God's throne-man. From a human perspective, Elijah's summons had an insane audacity to it.

The modern preacher of God's law-word does not have Elijah's prophetic calling, nor his miraculous power, nor does he have Elijah's especial status as God's throne-man. But he does have the same law of God, and he has the duty to summon men and nations to obey it or to be judged by it. He does have the calling to proclaim the good news of salvation as well as the certainty of judgment. All men are summoned to an audience with the King of Kings and the Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25; Rev. 19:16).

Obadiah carried the summons, and Ahab came. With a killing famine in all the area and surrounding nations, he was in a difficult position. All the nations knew of Elijah's role in the drought; if for no other reason, Ahab's own search for Elijah had alerted them (1 Kings 18:10). For all these nations, Elijah was obviously a dangerous man, but, equally clear, Ahab was also something of a Jonah, the man who had provoked a powerful man of God to a judgment from which they all suffered. The drought was not naturally caused, nor was it ending naturally. At this point, Ahab knew that killing Elijah could only perpetuate the judgment and make his problem more difficult.

As a result, for pragmatic considerations, Ahab swallowed his rage and pride and went to Elijah. The king came to the prophet, at his command, for an audience. One who failed to

come at the king's bidding was liable to death as an outlaw. Ahab recognized that the God of Elijah, Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts, was summoning him, and the summons implied death if he failed to appear.

This is the meaning of those amazing words, "Go tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here."

The word of the Lord God of Hosts is not a plea or a request: it is a summons, and it is the same as of old:

> I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live. (Deut. 30:19)

Chapter 5

The Audience and Trial

17. And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?
18. And he answered, I have not troubled Israel: but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim.
19. Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table.
20. So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel.
(1 Kings 18:17-20)

Ahab came as summoned to Elijah, but he could not refrain from making a bitter charge: "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" This is a *religious* charge. The sin of Achan was that he, by his offense against God, troubled Israel, and the place of his burial was called Achor, or Trouble (Josh. 7:26). Ahab's anger against Elijah is a religious one. The prosperity and success of Israel was in Ahab's eyes a product of the religious process of syncretism, peaceful alliances with pagan states and with pagan religions. By his uncompromising stand, Elijah had brought *trouble* to Israel, and near ruin. No doubt, Ahab had many reasons in mind to explain away the fact of judgment.

Elijah's answer is blunt: the troubler of Israel is the dynasty of Omri, because "ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim." The work of the prophets can never be understood unless we recognize that the word of the LORD which they proclaimed, and in terms of which they judged, was *the law,* the Torah.

Ahab wanted syncretism and compromise. Elijah ordered a confrontation and test, 450 prophets of Baal and 400 fertility cult prophets versus himself at Mount Carmel. At this point, with the drought so far gone that the next step was death for

all things, Ahab saw no way out but to comply. Thus, the people, prophets, Ahab, and Elijah gathered at Mount Carmel.

> 21. And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.
> 22. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.
> 23. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under:
> 24. And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.
> 25. And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under.
> 26. And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made.
> 27. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry, aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.
> 28. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.
> 29. And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. (1 Kings 18:21-29)

Elijah confronts the people with their compromise. He does not here accuse either Ahab or Jezebel, but rather the people. They halt or limp between two opinions, wanting the benefits of both without the commitment of either. "If the LORD be

God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." The people, however, were totally silent. They were confronted not only by two rival faiths, but by two rival men, Ahab and Elijah, and they chose silence. Hence, Elijah says, "I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD." His thrust was, "Only I fulfill my calling: the other prophets are either in hiding or silent."

Elijah then explains the test: each side will prepare an altar to its lord and ask that lord to answer by fire, setting ablaze the wood under the sacrificial bullock. The prophets of Baal had no choice but to comply. The people were present; Ahab had obeyed Elijah and ordered the confrontation.

Moreover, their belief in sympathetic magic made them ready to believe success was possible. For them, in a universe of chance, all things were possible, and man, by sympathetic magic, could create certain responses in nature. We still have rain dances and like performances among some American Indians and other peoples.

It is also true that some of these men could then and now perform remarkable feats by invoking the spirits or powers. We would call them demonic spirits and powers. More than a few missionaries have witnessed extraordinary incidents of this kind. Some American Indian "medicine men," for example, could pick up wild rattlers at a spring branding place, without any harm.

The prophets of Baal resorted to self-inflicted wounds in order to gain responding gifts from the powers. Some of the "cuts" could have been self-castration, at times resorted to by occultists of antiquity as a means of gaining a responding grant from the powers.

All these things Elijah observed with biting and satirical comments until mid-afternoon. Then it was Elijah's turn.

> 30. And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near to me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down.

31. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name:
32. And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed.
33. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood.
34. And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time.
35. And the water ran round about the altar: and he filled the trench also with water.
36. And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.
37. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.
38. Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.
39. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God: the LORD, he is the God. (1 Kings 18:30-39)

We are told that Elijah "repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down." This does not mean that he repaired an old altar, because vv. 31-32 make it clear that he built a new one. His work of "repair" was to reestablish symbolically, *first*, the purity of the faith, and, *second*, the unity of God's covenant with the twelve tribes of Israel. He took twelve stones to indicate that the division between Judah and Israel was wrong, and that God's covenant was not with a fragment but with the totality.

Next, Elijah had the altar, sacrifice, wood, and stones *drenched* with water from one of the few surviving springs

nearby. Elijah ordered the people to do the drenching: they were to be the witnesses to God's miraculous power.

Then Elijah prayed to the Lord, calling Him "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel." Hammond commented on this:

> Two things are to be noticed here: first, that this formula had only once before been used, and that by God Himself, before the giving of the law, at the burning bush. It was when God revealed Himself in *flaming fire* that He had proclaimed Himself the God of Abraham, &c. Secondly, that the variation "Israel" is made designedly (cf. v. 31), not only to proclaim the Lord as the "God of Israel" (cf. ch. xvii. 1), but also to suggest that the name and privileges of Israel belonged to all the sons of Jacob.[1]

In his prayer, Elijah asks *first*, "let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel." When later Elijah says, "I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts" (1 Kings 19:10), he speaks the truth. As a true man of God, Elijah was jealous for the Lord's honor and glory.

Second, Elijah then prays, let it be known "that I am thy servant." He had been internationally defamed and hunted. Rightfully, since he had suffered for the Lord's cause, he asked the Lord to vindicate him. This is a thoroughly godly concern.

Third, Elijah prays that God make it clear that Elijah is not only God's servant but also one faithful to God's command, "that I have done *all* these things at thy word." It was not Elijah's initiative, but the Lord's. Many knew Elijah to be a man of power and obviously believed that Elijah had used his powers maliciously against Israel. They were ready to ascribe Elijah's invocation of the drought to personal malice rather than God's command.

Fourth, Elijah prays that the people may know God as the Lord: "Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again." This was the only part of Elijah's

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[1] Joseph Hammond, "I Kings," in H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, *The Pulpit Commentary* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls), 425.

prayer which did not get a full answer, and hence his grief and despondency later (1 Kings 19:4-14).

God answered by fire (Heb. 12:29). The fire consumed not only the sacrifice, the wood, and the water, but also the very altar stones. The people, confronted by the majesty of the miracle, fell on their faces in awe, exclaiming, "The LORD, he is the God: the LORD, he is the God." Elijah's name means, "My God is Yahweh," and thus their exclamation echoed the very name of Elijah.

> And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there. (1 Kings 18:40)

This verse troubles many commentators, and some pass over it silently. J. Robinson feels that here "we see just how primitive at times were the religious and ethical responses of even the greatest of the early Israelites."[2] No doubt, these men feel that Elijah should have set up a council of churches or religions and worked out some comity arrangements with these Baalists.

But these prophets of Baal were the persecutors and murders, together with Jezebel, of God's prophets. They were guilty of idolatry, and they were guilty of murder. They were the troublers of Israel. They were brought down from the mountain to the dry streambed of the brook Kishon, so that soon the flowing waters from the coming rains would wash them and their blood away.

Our age has a strange tenderness for evil. I am regularly told by churchmen how wrong my faith in Biblical law is, and how harsh it is to criminals. Yet these same men are unconcerned when I tell them of the persecution of Christian School leaders and pastors. They will even rebuke me for associating with some of these men, because of real or imagined shortcomings

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[2] J. Robinson, "The First Book of Kings," in P.R. Ackroyd, A.R.C. Leaney, and J.W. Packer, editors, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 214.

in them. No doubt, they would have found Elijah to be a hindrance to the faith had they lived then.

Elijah killed these criminal prophets. The Bible gives us no ground for condemning this. Those who twist one or another text to find a pretext to condemn Elijah do violence to Scripture and are an offense to the Lord.

> 41. And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.
> 42. So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees.
> 43. And he said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times.
> 44. And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.
> 45. And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel.
> 46. And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel. (1 Kings 18:41-46)

This remarkable day comes to a close in a remarkable way. *First*, before there is no hint of any sign of rain, Elijah orders Ahab to eat and drink freely; the drought is over, he declares, and it is time to celebrate. Ahab obeys.

Second, as Ahab waits dutifully at the foot of the mountain, until ordered to be off with his chariot (v. 44), Elijah goes up to pray for rain, and his prayer is answered.

Third, we suddenly find that Elijah has a servant. He is God's throne-man, and, in this confrontation, God had both given him a servant and also publicly vindicated him. Elijah on the mountain is waited on by a servant to do his bidding, and King Ahab had been awaiting Elijah's orders word at the base.

Fourth, Ahab obeys God's man Elijah; the servant obeys him, and the weather also obeys him in a sense. God has

vindicated both Elijah and Himself. Now, in the power of the Lord, Elijah outruns Ahab's chariot to the entrance of Jezreel.

God had made the powerful king a servant of His servant, compelling Ahab to answer Elijah's summons and move at Elijah's bidding. There was not only a mighty miracle but a great reversal manifested in the events at Carmel. Elijah received King Ahab, the priests of Baal, and the people of Israel in audience at Mount Carmel, and the Lord God confirmed Elijah's power and office as His throne-man.

Chapter 6

The Shaking and Judgment Begin

1. And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.
2. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.
3. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there.
4. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.
5. And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat.
6. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again.
7. And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee.
8. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.
9. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?
10. And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.
11. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake.

12. And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.
13. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?
14. And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.
15. And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on the way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria:
16. And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou appoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.
17. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay.
18. Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him. (1 Kings 19:1-18)

In the Transfiguration of our Lord, the two men who appeared and talked with Him were Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:30f). Here, it is Jesus Christ, the Angel of the LORD, who appears to strengthen Elijah (1 Kings 19:7; Isa. 63:9).

It is a mistake to assume that the events of this passage followed immediately after the miracle of Mount Carmel. The amazing miracle on the mountain had an immediate impact on the men of Israel. As the days wore on, their religiosity waned, and no doubt the memory of their earlier reaction was an embarrassment.

In 1971, a damaging earthquake hit Southern California in Los Angeles County. For many days and even weeks, it was a common topic of discussion, in store check-out lines, among friends and acquaintances, and so on. The easy humanism of most was temporarily broken; man and the world seemed to be teetering on thin ice which could break without warning.

Then the old humanistic unconcern reasserted itself, and the earlier fears gave way to an increasingly rarer memory of the earthquake, and a memory then sometimes tinged with amusement.

What was Elijah doing after the miracle? He was no doubt preaching the Bible, the Torah. Nothing is more quickly tiresome and annoying to sinners than the law of God: no other gods, honoring parents, no adultery, no false witness, no theft, and so on, strictly dull subjects as compared to miracles. Also, such a religion is unappealing alongside one which says in effect that man can eat his cake and have it too, or that adultery can sometimes be a good and wholesome act, even a religious one.

Israel had a bad conscience about Elijah: he was very obviously a remarkable prophet—but a crude one. He lacked the sophistication of the times. Hence, Jezebel, who quickly sensed the changed climate, knew that killing Elijah might be unpopular. It was better to warn him of an impending death sentence and give him time to escape. But, if need be, Jezebel meant to kill him. Elijah knew this "and went for his life."

It was not fear on Elijah's part that led him to flee, but rather discouragement and a loss of hope for Israel. We must never forget that the prophets loved the covenant and the covenant nation. The sins of Israel and Judah were an intense grief to them. The heart of Elijah's cry to God is not, my life is threatened: "It is enough; now, O LORD, *take away my life:* for I am not better than my fathers." I have no more succeeded than my fathers in the faith, the prophets before me, in arresting Israel's apostasy. This is the cause of Elijah's grief, and the flagging of his will to live. The covenant people are covenant-breakers, and the world is falling under the power of the enemies of God. The covenant people were neither a saved, nor a saving people.

Elijah left his servant in Judah and went out into the wilderness. The first Moses led God's people out of Egypt to Mount Sinai (or, Horeb), there to receive God's covenant law.

The second Moses, Elijah, led Israel to Mount Carmel to witness the God who answers by fire, as He did at Sinai (Ex. 19:16). Moses and Elijah met with the third and Great Moses, Jesus Christ, "and spake of his decease (literally, *exodus*) which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). The first Moses gave the law; the second set forth the judgment of the law; the third set forth the only justification possible for sinful man through the law-imputation, atonement, and justification.

In the wilderness, Elijah is miraculously fed by the third Moses, and he is miraculously sustained as he goes to Horeb or Sinai, to the place where Moses saw God, to the cave and to the mountain (Ex. 33:11, 18-23).

Three great and frightening things followed: wind, earthquake, and fire, all caused by God, but God was not comprehended in any of them. We are told specifically that the Lord was not *in* the wind, the earthquake, or the fire. Then comes "the still small voice." *First*, we are not told that the Lord was not in the still small voice, but neither are we told that He was in it. *Second*, Snaith has pointed out that the Hebrew is literally "'a sound of a gentle stillness,' i.e., an eerie stillness so still that it can be heard."[1]

The *still small voice* has been a favorite text with preachers, but the usual interpretations distort the meaning of this passage. Moreover, the plain fact is that both Moses' experience in seeing God, and Elijah's, are beyond our ability to fathom.

We do know that at this point Elijah came to the mouth of the cave, after covering his face. The wind, earthquake, and fire had heralded God's coming: the silence now announced it. "The LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him" (or, be silent, all the earth, before Him, Hab. 2:20).

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[1] Norman H. Snaith, "I Kings," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. III (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1954), 163.

Again comes the question from the Lord: "What does thou here Elijah?," and again Elijah confesses his grief over Israel's apostasy, and his feeling of defeat.

Those who hold that the still small voice meant a change of directions for God and more "spiritual" ways of operation have read the text carelessly. What the Lord declares is that Israel now faces *judgment*: invasion by Hazael, and rebellion within by Jehu. Elijah's work will be carried on by Elisha. Even more, a remnant remains, "seven thousand," a number of fullness. All of God's elect are there, and the future of the covenant is in them.

The great wind which broke the rocks, the earthquake, and the fire symbolize the judgment going from the mountain of God which is the Law against covenant-breaking Israel. The Lord is not in Israel, but His judgment shall be. It is Elijah through Elisha who anoints and sets apart the judgment-bringers, Hazael and Jehu, and Elijah who anoints Elisha. Anointing means *separation to God's use*, and we have here a remarkable series of anointings for men who will be instruments of judgment. Ahab and the covenant-breaking nation shall not prevail: Elijah and the God of the covenant shall. The future belongs to the faithful remnant, who shall in due time inherit the earth and delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11; Matt. 5:5). Meanwhile, everything that exists is undergoing a total shaking, so that only those things which are of the Lord remain (Heb. 12:26-29). From Sinai and the Law from the God of Elijah, that great shaking was going forth. Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration would look back and see its results, and ahead to see the great new-covenant-world whose prophet he is.

Chapter 7
The Servant–Son

> 19. So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him.
> 20. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?
> 21. And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him. (1 Kings 19:19-21)

We know nothing of Elijah's background, whether rich or poor, prominent or lowly. We do know that Elisha came from a very wealthy family, obviously owners of considerable land. We first meet Elisha in the field, plowing. Twelve pairs of oxen are at work, and twelve men. The last of these is young Elisha. The capital required to have and train twelve yoke of oxen was a substantial one. Elisha was an important heir.

Now Elisha inherits something different. Barry wrote that the casting of one's mantle over another person is "said to have been part of the form of adoption of a child."[1] Casting the mantle over another was definitely an act incorporating that person into one's own life and taking them under one's care and protection. It meant adoption and more. We encounter this practice in Ruth 3:9:

> And he (Boaz) said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.

Ruth, by asking that Boaz' mantle be cast over her, was reminding him of their legal relationship and invoking its

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[1] Alfred Barry, "I Kings," in C.J. Elliott, editor, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. III (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 85.

realization. Elijah, in casting his mantle over Elisha, declared that Elisha was now his son, servant, and successor.

In any approach to a superior, a man either sought the protection of his mantle, *i.e.*, incorporation into his family, or faced him as an enemy. To accept the mantle or the robe was to accept *protection* on the one hand, and the responsibility of *service* on the other.

In the New Testament, our Lord deals with this fact in the Parable of the Wedding Feast. For a man to enter the king's presence clothed in anything save the king's robes or mantle was an affront calling for total judgment (Matt. 22:1-14). It meant a refusal to be under the king, or to be his charge, preserved and protected by him. It signified self-righteousness, as against the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Elisha understood the meaning of Elijah's act. He was immediately, by God's grace through Elijah, made Elijah's son, servant, and successor. Hence, he asked *permission* before returning to kiss his father and mother good-bye before joining Elijah. Elijah in effect said, "I am not preventing you: take your leave, and then follow me." Elisha ended his relationship to his natural family and his old heirship: he killed the two oxen, used the yoke to boil the meat, said his farewells, and then joined Elijah.

We are told that he "ministered unto him." He was Elisha's son and servant, caring for his new father. This service marked him as the heir and new prophet, as 2 Kings 3:11 makes clear:

> But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire of the LORD by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.

Note the expression: Elisha is the man "which poured water on the hands of Elijah." This marked Elisha as a *servant-son.*

This fact also sets forth a necessary aspect of the Christian calling. In pagan religions, men resorted to the gods and their temples for insurance, resources, and protection of a limited

nature. Man was implicitly the sovereign. He chose the god whom he would approach for a given service. That service might be protection of one's person or cargo in a sea voyage or a land journey; it could be for help in illness, or a love affair. The service was *bought and paid for;* the purchaser could be appreciative, grateful, or disenchanted, but it was his decision to react to the god or goddess as he saw fit. The pagan *bought* a god's services. The god might be more powerful than he, but sovereign choice rested with man. The pagan might flatter a god and speak of adoration and worship, but his actual practical purpose was *the purchase of services and help.* He shopped for these as we might shop for a better grocer or plumber.

From this it is clear that paganism still marks many churchmen. They come to God and Christ for fire and life insurance, for help, and for the best of all resources. But they do *not* come as servant-sons whose total lives are now under God's command. They do not see themselves as Christ's property, bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19-20). They may speak of the *doctrine* of adoption, but they do not see adoption as Elijah, Elisha, and all of Scripture does.

When Paul speaks of adoption in Galatians 4:1-7, he speaks of the fact that the child does not differ from a servant; although lord of all as heir, he is, during his tutelage, under authority and under authority on the same basis as a servant. Paul speaks of the contrast between service before and after Christ, but in Romans 8:15-17, it is clear that he also means that we are as children when adopted, babes in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1). We are servant-sons, called to grow up "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). To be a perfect or mature man in Christ does not mean to cease from service but to serve as a son, with authority, not as a tutored child.

Men who are truly men in Christ, *men who command, are men who are under authority* (Matt. 8:9). The measure of our power of command is the measure of the authority we recognize and obey. Elijah and Elisha were men under

authority, and therefore men of power and command. Our Lord is Himself described in like terms:

> 8. Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;
> 9. And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;
> 10. Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.
> 11. Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.
> 12. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.
> 13. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.
> 14. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Heb. 5:8-14)

To be sons thus means to be strong in Christ's service and fully under the authority of God's word. The servant-son is the man of power and command.

Chapter 8

The Arrogance of Power

1. And Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together: and there were thirty and two kings with him, and horses, and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it.
2. And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Ben-hadad,
3. Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest, are mine.
4. And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have.
5. And the messengers came again, and said, Thus speaketh Ben-hadad, saying, Although I have sent unto thee, saying, Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children;
6. Yet I will send my servants unto thee to morrow about this time, and they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy servants; and it shall be, that whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put it in their hand, and take it away.
7. Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, Mark, I pray you, and see how this man seeketh mischief: for he sent unto me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold; and I denied him not.
8. And all the elders and all the people said unto him, Hearken not unto him, nor consent.
9. Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Ben-hadad, Tell my lord the king, All that thou didst send for to thy servant at the first I will do: but this thing I may not do. And the messengers departed, and brought him word again.
10. And Ben-hadad sent unto him, and said, The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me.
11. And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.

12. And it came to pass, when Ben-hadad heard this message, as he was drinking, he and the kings in the pavilions, that he said unto his servants, Set yourselves in array. And they set themselves in array against the city.
13. And, behold, there came a prophet unto Ahab king of Israel, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD.
14. And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Even by the young men of the princes of the provinces. Then he said, Who shall order the battle? And he answered, Thou.
15. Then he numbered the young men of the princes of the provinces, and they were two hundred and thirty two: and after them he numbered all the people, even all the children of Israel, being seven thousand.
16. And they went out at noon. But Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him.
17. And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Ben-hadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria.
18. And he said, Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive.
19. So these young men of the princes of the provinces came out of the city, and the army which followed them.
20. And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians fled; and Israel pursued them: and Ben-hadad the king of Syria escaped on an horse with the horsemen.
21. And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter. (1 Kings 20:1-21)

Elijah and Elisha are absent in this chapter, but the issues are the same, man's way versus God's way. We have here a dramatic and telling example of the arrogance of power, of sinful power.

Ben-hadad's sudden invasion of Israel was an excellent example of one of the most common of the world's evils, a blind and warped foreign policy. Even in terms of his

humanism, Ben-hadad's foreign policy was insane, but sin is always a form of madness.

The great power and threat of the day was Assyria. The forces of Assyria were moving in the direction of Syria and Israel. Humanism, as it faced this crisis, had two answers. *First*, some of the small states, like Israel, hoped to see a coalition of states in alliance against Assyria. This was in fact Ahab's policy. At the indecisive battle of Aagar in 853 B.C., against Shalmaneser III (850-824 B.C.) of Assyria, there was an alliance of ten kings, including Ahab and Syria, against the Assyrian advance. Such an alliance, however, involved a radical religious compromise, since an alliance requires, at the least, toleration at the least of an ally's faith. *Second*, Syria looked to an alliance of anti-Assyrian states at times, but, when the *immediate* Assyrian threat was absent, hoped to duplicate Assyrian imperialism by conquering its prospective allies and making them subjects and forced servants of the Syrian power.

The ultimatum issued by Ben-hadad to Ahab is commonplace in history, and, in altered forms, it is still very much with us. He demanded the wealth of Ahab, and his wives and children. To strip a conquered nation of its wealth was to render further resistance less likely. After World War I, Germany was dramatically stripped of wealth by demands for indemnities and reparations. After World War II, Germany was not only stripped but also partitioned.

To strip an enemy of his wealth is thus an ancient practice, sometimes brutally, sometimes with disguises, imposed on the loser. Germany practiced it in the Franco-Prussian War; it had previously been often practiced on Germany. After World War II, the Soviet Union openly and brutally exacted land, slave labor, and all kinds of wealth in equipment and other forms from Germany. The Western powers were more discreet and "legal:" they seized foreign assets, patents, and the like. On the whole, however, the State, and especially the modern State, sees as its chief enemy its own people, and it preys on them daily on one pretext or another.

The demand for the conquered ruler's wives, and commonly also those of prominent men, was aimed at the humiliation and degradation of the conquered, to shame and disgrace their manhood by commanding their lives at the most intimate point, copulation with their wives. This same arrogance of power is still with us: adultery is especially appealing to many, not simply for its sexual pleasure, but for the pleasure of degrading and humbling another man by commanding his wife. Men in positions of power often delight in this kind of sexuality. An internationally known historian, who died recently, was widely known among graduate students for this trait. Because of his power, he could assure his graduate students of good positions. He demanded as his due their wives. In one infamous incident, where a student complied grudgingly and resentfully, he openly took the wife, during a party in his home, into a bedroom with an announced declaration of his purpose. The wives, also hungry for power and advancement, would comply, and would despise their husbands.

As a secondary factor, Ben-hadad, by taking over Ahab's wives, would also assume the treaty relationship with the countries from which these women came. Royal marriages were contracted to establish closer ties with another nation. Ben-hadad would thus become the new factor in these relationships.

Another demand by Ben-hadad was for surrender of the children. The young princes would then be educated and trained in the purposes of the imperial power and returned home only when ready to serve their overlord. Then, even if rebellious, they would still be alien to their own people.

This practice is still with us, although the form has changed. The modern state demands that *all* the children of the nation be surrendered into its hands for education and training to serve the state's purpose. Not surprisingly, most of these children become enemies of their own parents and rebellious against them. The arrogance of power is still with us. Ben-hadad is now our elected and appointed officer of state.

Assyria and Ben-hadad had trapped Ahab within the walls of Samaria, with only 7,000 fighting men, whereas Assyria and its subject states had far in excess of 100,000 men. Ahab thus surrendered to this initial demand. Without waiting to put it into effect, Ben-hadad also demanded the right for his "servants," *i.e.*, all his troops, to loot the city at will, and without resistance. Instead of Ahab's wealth, wives, and children being sent out to Ben-hadad, the city would have to be opened to the Syrian forces, to plunder as they pleased. At this point, Ahab and the elders of Israel resisted. Ben-hadad made his intention to destroy them all quite clear. Ahab responded with a proverb, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness (or, armor) boast himself as he that putteth it off."

Only now, when a stand had been decided on, did the Lord act. A prophet appeared to give promise of victory, and to offer a plan: 232 young princes, acting as commandos, were to go out. The immense Syrian army did not take them seriously, and the drunken Ben-hadad stupidly ordered them to be taken alive and brought to him. To take a fighting man alive is a serious disadvantage. Ahab's 7,000 quickly joined them, and the leaderless Syrian army collapsed into panic and a disorderly flight.

> 22. And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee.
> 23. And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.
> 24. And do this thing, Take the kings away, every man out of his place, and put captains in their rooms:
> 25. And number thee an army, like the army that thou hast lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so.

26. And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Ben-hadad numbered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel.
27. And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present, and went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them like two flocks of kids; but the Syrians filled the country.
28. And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the LORD.
29. And they pitched one over against the other seven days. And so it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined: and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day.
30. But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and there a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men that were left. And Ben-hadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber.
31. And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life.
32. So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Ben-hadad saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, Is he yet alive? he is my brother.
33. Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it; and they said, Thy brother Ben-hadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Ben-hadad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot.
34. And Ben-hadad said unto him, The cities, which my father took from thy father, I will restore; and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away. (1 Kings 20:22-34)

The household officials of Ben-hadad could not blame their king for his drunkenness as the cause of his defeat. Instead, they blamed the thirty vassal kings and suggested that they be replaced by military officers. Moreover, they declared that the locale of the battle was the problem; the gods of Israel were gods of the hills, and the battle was fought in the hills, whereas a battle in the plains would give Syria superiority. We know that God took great offense at this view (v. 28).

What was involved? Men in the Near East did not deny the existence of some great God behind all things. Rather, they doubted that such a God would be involved in history. The world was dominated by kings who were potential gods and hence divine kings. Behind them were various spirit-forces or gods, kings who preceded them, who controlled their particular area and nation. The king and the nation were the property of the god, and could be the god's children. Ben-hadad means *Son of Hadad*; Hadad, meaning *Thunderer*, was a Syrian god. Ben-hadad was thus the son and protégé of his particular Baal or lord, even as Ahab was the child of his Baal. This theology was humanism. It made the gods into rulers of creation, and the gods were divinized men. Zeus, among the Greeks, was a dead king, and the location of his grave was known.

God's anger against this theology was not only because it was false but also because it made creation subject to the control of man. Ahab's foreign policy had as its premise this same belief that man's way could determine history. In two great miracles, the Lord was confounding Syria and demonstrating to Ahab that it is not man's might or way, but the Lord alone who gives the victory and determines history, a lesson Ahab refused to accept.

The defeat of Syria was dramatic; 100,000 foot soldiers were killed. Aphek, faced with an army in flight, seeking refuge within its walls, apparently closed the city gates, perhaps at Ben-hadad's orders, after the king found shelter with the royal guards. The panic-filled army brought down the walls as they struggled to surmount them, and another 27,000 were killed.

The city was now defenseless. Ben-hadad's counselors suggested an attempt to evoke Ahab's mercy. Ahab, dedicated to his dream of an alliance, would prefer Syria as an ally to an enemy *or* a subject state. Hence, they approached with a show of humility, as men under sentence of death and with a rope around their necks. Ahab called Ben-hadad "brother" and insisted on a covenant or alliance.

But to make a covenant with Ben-hadad was to deny the covenant with Jehovah. It meant trusting Syria rather than the Lord. It was thus not only an act of apostasy but of open contempt for God's person and His miraculous victories. Ahab was saying that Syria offered him better protection against Assyria than did the Lord. Ahab acted in faith, albeit not faith in the Lord, but in his own strategy.

> 35. And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of the LORD, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him.
> 36. Then said he unto him, Because thou has not obeyed the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee. And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and slew him.
> 37. Then he found another man, and said, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man smote him, so that in smiting he wounded him.
> 38. So, the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with ashes upon his face.
> 39. And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver.
> 40. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be: thyself hast decided it.
> 41. And he hasted, and took the ashes away from his face; and the king of Israel discerned him that he was of the prophets.
> 42. And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed

> to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people.
> 43. And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria. (1 Kings 20:35-43)

The issue was still the same here as at Mount Carmel: God vs. Baal, the Lord's way vs. man's way. Ahab's trust was in his own devices. No less than Ben-hadad, he was guilty of the arrogance of power: he knew "better" than God what was the right way. The Syrian belittled God by limiting His power to the hills; Ahab belittled God even more: the God who twice gave him the victory was denied in every area. Ahab denied God, knowing His power, because he rejected the price of that power, which was covenant faithfulness. Ahab wanted no part of God and His covenant law. He assumed that, having rejected God, he could then proceed on his own; he assumed that it was possible to step outside of God's government and move into a neutral area where man's government could both operate and prevail. He was thereby limiting God's power as surely as the Syrians did. The arrogance of humanistic power is that it assumes a neutral zone where God's power does not prevail, and where man can work out his own plans to his heart's content. Ahab found God's covenant law restrictive. His foreign policy offered, he felt, hope to all the little nations of the area against Assyria. God's covenant law and promises were to him unmindful of the "big picture," of the totality of concerns, nations, and problems. Ahab was ready to work with God, and to accept God's help, but only if God would work with him.

An enacted parable followed which set forth God's "intolerance." One son of the prophets, with a revelation from God, demanded that his neighbor strike him. The man refused, and he was sentenced to death by a lion. The lesson was clear: not even a prophet can sit in judgment on the word of God. Another then struck the son of the prophet, who then either put ashes, to simulate perhaps battle dust, or, as some translate it, bandages over his face.

When Ahab passed by, the young man, appealing to Ahab, said that he was a soldier. A very valuable prisoner, worth "a talent of silver" in ransom, a very goodly amount, was entrusted to him. The condition of the trust was that he either forfeit his life if he lost him, or pay the ransom himself, an impossible amount for an ordinary soldier. He lost the man, and now, he said, he was appealing to Ahab for a stay of execution. Ahab curtly refused. The young prophet then revealed himself, saying, *You have judged yourself before God: Ben-hadad was entrusted to you by God for execution. Because you have released him, your life and your nation are now forfeited before God.*

To read this chapter without reference to current affairs is to sin. Men and nations today operate as though most of the world were a morally neutral zone in which man's way and wisdom can prevail. As a result, they are antinomian and faithless to the covenant. The terms of God's covenant are God's law; where there is no covenant, there is nothing but judgment.

The two basic aspects of a covenant are, *first*, the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:16-22), and, *second*, law. The blood signifies the death penalty for violation of the covenant law, and the law is the terms of the covenant.

God in His grace provides Jesus Christ as our covenantal head. His death is the satisfaction of the covenant law and our restoration into covenant fellowship. We are now given the spirit of obedience to delight in God's law, and the spirit is joy within us that the blood of Jesus Christ has redeemed us from rebellion into faith and obedience.

The modern-day Ahabs are all around us, in pulpit and pew, and in offices of state. They will be judged no less than were Ahab and Jezebel. The arrogance of humanistic power is always brought low and broken.

Chapter 9

Dispossession

1. And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.
2. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money.
3. And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.
4. And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.
5. But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?
6. And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard.
7. And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.
8. So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth.
9. And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people:
10. And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.
11. And the men of his city, even the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, and as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them.

12. They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people.
13. And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died.
14. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned, and is dead.
15. And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead.
16. And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.
(1 Kings 21:1-16)

The presupposition of this entire chapter is Biblical law and its binding nature. The sale of farm land in God's throne land was not permitted (Lev. 25:23-28; Num. 36:1-13). Not even a prince could dispossess a man (Ezek. 46:18). Land was not privately owned but family-owned. Naboth's farm belonged, not to him, but to *the family*, past, present, and future. This aspect of property is still God's law: property is not the possession of a private individual or of the state, but of a family, and it is a godly inheritance and a stewardship to be treated always as a trust from the past to the future.

The trial of Naboth was in terms of the law of blasphemy (Lev. 24:14-16; Deut. 13:6-11, 17:2-5; etc.), and in terms of the required two witnesses (Deut. 17:16; 19:15). The fast for a national calamity was a common practice (Judges 20:26; 1 Sam. 7:6; 1 Sam. 31:13; 2 Chron. 20:2-4; Joel 1:14; 2:12).

Naboth, an innocent man, was executed, as were his sons with him (2 Kings 9:26), for refusing to sell his land to King Ahab. The recorded instances of a sale of land in the Old Testament are by Canaanites (2 Sam. 24:24).

Ahab, like many a tyrant, avoided the direct involvement with murder. He wanted Naboth killed, but without his personal knowledge and immediate participation. He therefore sulked, knowing he would gain, and working to gain, Jezebel's concern and involvement. It was beneath his dignity to plan the murder; Jezebel was Ahab's ready tool in this strategy.

The villagers and town elders were also willing and sanctimonious tools in Naboth's murder. Their part was clearly as evil as was Jezebel's and Ahab's, but perhaps the greatest sin was Ahab's. Responsibility cannot be delegated away where sin is concerned. None of the parties involved had any valid excuse. The villagers might also have shared Naboth's fate had they resisted, but they faced instead a greater judgment from the Lord. Ahab had his judgment spelled out first of all, and by Elijah.

Jezebel knew Israel. She could never have put her planned murder into effect if the people had been godly and had resisted. Rather, the scandal of exposure would have shaken the throne. Jezebel believed the people would do anything if bidden. They might have a form of godliness but none of the power thereof (2 Tim. 3:5). Jezebel thus respected the form: the entire proceedings used the *façade* of God's law in order to commit murder. The modern church will also use the façade of God's law to disobey God and to defame His servants. The civil courts continue to invoke God's name and declare justice to be their goal, even as they dispense humanism and injustice. The criminal, the prostitute, and the hoodlum are evil enough, but it is the sanctimonious sinners who are the greatest evil. It is Phariseeism which our Lord most strongly condemns.

God exacts vengeance for every violation of His law. He declares His judgment on Ahab's house and brings it to pass (2 Kings 9:26). But what happens when it is the Lord who brings justice to pass rather than men, judges, pastors, and rulers? The Lord is emphatic that, beyond a certain point, He will not hear men's prayers:

> And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day. (1 Samuel 8:18)

Indeed, in certain cases, prayer is forbidden to us (Jer. 7:16; 14:11; 1 John 5:16). From some, we are to withdraw ourselves, because the Lord has withdrawn Himself (1 Cor. 5:9, 11; 2 Thess. 3:5-6,14; 1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 3:10; 2 John 10).

Where men bring God's justice to pass, there God's blessings abound; where God must bring in judgment, He also brings in a curse with His justice. To wait, therefore, for the Lord to defend the Naboths of our day is to wait for God's curse and judgment.

The whole city of Jezreel was involved in the guilt of Naboth's murder (1 Kings 21:13), and the whole land. If unpunished, a crime and its guilt lay upon the entire land; if an injustice were wrought, invoking God's name and law, as in the murder of Naboth, all partook of blasphemy and incurred the death penalty. To be silent where God's law is broken or misused is *blasphemy.*

The silence of Israel before Ahab and Jezebel was rooted in their *syncretism.* Like Ahab, the Israelites believed in God, after a fashion, but not to the same degree as do the devils in hell, who "believe, and tremble" (James 2:19), while they refuse to obey God the Lord. Israel trembled before Ahab and Jezebel, not before the Lord. Ahab believed in the wisdom and power of man's way, and so did all Israel, because the people moved in terms of the fear of man, not the fear of the Lord.

Solomon tells us that "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." (Prov. 29:25).

> The fear of the LORD tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil. (Prov. 19:23)

> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Prov. 1:7)

Of the wicked man, David says, "there is no fear of God before his eyes." (Ps. 36:1).

We have no reason to believe that Naboth was any better than his neighbors, nor any reason not to believe that he was a godly man. We are told nothing, except that he defended his ancestral land. The point of this episode is *not* the character of Naboth, but the depravity of Israel, and its syncretism. On Mount Carmel, the people refused to take a stand when Elijah said, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word" (1 Kings 18:21). Israel was again silent when Jezebel drove Elijah out of the land. Moreover, Israel gave no evidence of displeasure at Ahab's apostate foreign policy and his trust in alliances rather than the Lord.

Whatever Naboth's personal character apart from his defense of his land, his blood was innocent blood. He was murdered by means of the abuse of law. The murder of any man is evil, and the use of the law, in this case God's law, to commit murder compounds the crime. It adds blasphemy to murder. The whole land was thus again implicated in the crime. Israel was already a condemned people (1 Kings 20:42); this further offense only made it clear that they deserved their condemnation.

> 17. And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,
> 18. Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it.
> 19. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, in the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.
> 20. And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD:

> 21. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel,
> 22. And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Ba-asha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou has provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin.
> 23. And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.
> 24. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat;
> 25. But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.
> 26. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.
> 27. And it came to pass, when Ahab heard these words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.
> 28. And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,
> 29. Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house. (1 Kings 21:17-29)

A fundamental principle of Biblical law is *blood for blood*:

> Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man. (Gen. 9:6)

> And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. (Ex. 21:23-25)

Dogs licked up the blood of Naboth; there, in the same place, dogs would lick up the blood of Ahab. Because Ahab had publicly used God's law to commit murder, God would publicly bring shame upon him, in the same disgrace. Scavenger dogs would lick up his blood.

All Israel knew of Ahab's murder of Naboth and was silent. The public judgment upon Ahab, in the very same place,

would not only bring home the justice of God upon Ahab to all of Israel, but would also make clear to them that their own judgment was inescapable. In every age, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). No doubt, the partial revival under Elisha's ministry was in part due to the shock and fear of judgment.

The promise to Ahab is the total annihilation of his family. All were implicated; all shared in the guilt as well as the profits of Naboth's murder. Jezebel is singled out for special mention, because she was more than a profiting follower in Ahab's sins: she was an active partner.

Ahab attributed Elijah's words to enmity rather than God's justice, although, in his heart, he knew the truth of them. Elijah did not give priority in the murder to Jezebel, evil though she was: it was Ahab's work. "Hast thou killed and also taken possession?" Ahab's sins were murder, theft, and blasphemy in using God's law to commit these crimes. Jezebel was the bolder criminal, but Ahab the chief sinner.

Ahab was a syncretist. He believed in God but served himself. Where God suited his purposes, he obeyed God, no doubt, but where Baal suited his purposes, he was a Baalist. At all times, it was his own way and will which Ahab obeyed. As a result, the prophetic author of 1 Kings compares him to the totally godless Amorites who had been dispossessed from Canaan. Humanism, man's way, means *dispossession.* It is pursued, in every age, by men like Ahab, as the means to possession. Murder, theft, blasphemy, and false witness are used to increase man's power, kingdom, and glory, and, for a time, they seem to succeed. Asaph describes, in Psalm 73, his dismay in seeing the prosperity of the wicked, but, in seeing God's purposes, he understands the coming judgment and God's unfailing righteousness. David tells us, and our Lord repeats it, that "the meek shall inherit the earth: and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Ps. 37:11; Matt. 5:5). Dispossession and captivity are the lot of the wicked. Ahab had "sold" himself, Elijah declares, "to work evil in the

sight of the LORD." He had made himself a slave to evil, and into judgment and a felon's death he would go.

This judgment was a shock to Ahab, whose conviction now equalled that of the devils: he both believed in God and trembled (James 2:19). We are told that, in terror, he rent his clothes, put on sackcloth, fasted, "and went softly." The *New English Bible* renders this "went about muttering to himself," implying panic to the point of instability. Apparently, too, he was in prayer. At any rate, the Lord stayed the total destruction of Ahab's dynasty until after Ahab's death.

But God did not lift the judgment of *dispossession.* In our day, the nations are virtually all heedless of the Lord. The historically Christian countries are filled with Ahab-like churches, nominally Christian and to all practical intent humanistic. Their compromise with the Molech-Baal of statism, of humanistic law and education, and with an indifference to all but the minimum forms of the faith is routine. They say, "Lord, Lord," and refuse to know Him. They turn with hatred on all who take God at His word. Like Ahab, they call God's faithful followers *enemies*, and they accuse them of troubling the Israel of God (1 Kings 18:17). But the Lord in His time shall trouble them, and dispossess them, and His judgment on them shall be more severe than on Sodom and Gomorrah, for to be outwardly of the Lord and to despise His law-word is blasphemy, and a more fearful sin than open unbelief and sin. As our Lord said of the outward Israel of His day,

> 21. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.
> 22. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.
> 23. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

> 24. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee. (Matt. 11:21-24)

The Pharisees looked at the sins of other men, and of other nations, and said, we are better than they, whatever we are. Surely, God will favor us, for at our worst, we are superior to these other men (Luke 18:10-14). But it was Israel which was judged *before* Assyria, Babylon, or Rome.

Where are the men like John Welch, who will pray with intensity for their people, as did Welch, John Knox's son-in-law, begging, "Lord, wilt thou not grant me Scotland?" Our concerns now are as narrow as our house, and as petty as ourselves, and we fret about our own affairs and grow indignant over our own personal problems, while we are careless in prayer, and indifferently remember God's Kingdom and God's cause. Let us remember, there is not only a syncretism of *faith*, but also a syncretism of *concern*. What we can get excited, happy, or indignant about most readily will reveal where our heart and our treasure are. Our *concerns* today reveal our syncretism: they are as narrow as we are, and they are blasphemous. For an herb garden, Ahab murdered, robbed, bore false witness, and blasphemed, and he paid the price. Our evils may not be as great, but our priorities are usually as *petty*. For an herb garden, Ahab's *concern*, his dynasty perished. For their readiness to be party to Ahab's ways, a nation was condemned (1 Kings 20:42). It is not the petty who inherit the earth, but the blessed meek, the tamed of God, who are ruled by Him in all their being.

Ahab's priority was an herb garden. Wrong priorities in any man is sin. What are our priorities?

Chapter 10
The Death of Ahab

1. And they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel.
2. And it came to pass in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel.
3. And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?
4. And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramothgilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses.
5. And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to day.
6. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramothgilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king.
7. And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him?
8. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so.
9. Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, Hasten hither Micaiah the son of Imlah.
10. And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them.
11. And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron: and he said, Thus saith the LORD, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them.
12. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramothgilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the king's hand.

13. And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good.
14. And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak.
15. So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramothgilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king.
16. And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the LORD?
17. And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace.
18. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?
19. And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left.
20. And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.
21. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him.
22. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so.
23. Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee.
24. But Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near, and smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee?
25. And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself.

26. And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son;
27. And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace.
28. And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you.
29. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramothgilead.
30. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and enter into the battle; but put thou on thy robes. And the king of Israel disguised himself, and went into the battle.
31. But the king of Syria commanded his thirty and two captains that had rule over his chariots, saying, Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel.
32. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, Surely it is the king of Israel. And they turned aside to fight against him: and Jehoshaphat cried out.
33. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him.
34. And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded.
35. And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot.
36. And there went a proclamation throughout the host about the going down of the sun, saying, Every man to his city, and every man to his own country.
37. So the king died, and was brought to Samaria; and they buried the king in Samaria.
38. And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his

armour; according unto the word of the LORD which he spake.
39. Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house which he made, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?
40. So Ahab slept with his fathers; and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead.
41. And Jehoshaphat the son of Asa began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel.
42. Jehoshaphat was thirty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi.
43. And he walked in all the ways of Asa his father; he turned not aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of the LORD: nevertheless the high places were not taken away; for the people offered and burnt incense yet in the high places.
44. And Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel.
45. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, and his might that he shewed, and how he warred, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?
46. And the remnant of the sodomites, which remained in the days of his father Asa, he took out of the land.
47. There was then no king in Edom: a deputy was king.
48. Jehoshaphat made ships of Tharshish to go to Ophir for gold: but they went not; for the ships were broken at Eziongeber.
49. Then said Ahaziah the son of Ahab unto Jehoshaphat, Let my servants go with thy servants in the ships. But Jehoshaphat would not.
50. And Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Jehoram his son reigned in his stead.
51. Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel.
52. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin:

53. For he served Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked to anger the LORD God of Israel, according to all that his father had done. (1 Kings 22:1-53)

Ben–hadad failed to live up to the treaty with Ahab and retained Ramoth in Gilead, which he had promised to cede to Israel. Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, was in Samaria. Earlier, he had made an alliance with Ahab, and his son Joram had married Ahab's daughter (2 Chron. 21:6). On this occasion, the visit was a festal one, to help cement the alliance (2 Chron. 18). Ahab used the occasion to require military aid against Syria. Jehoshaphat answered in terms of the ancient requirements of treaties: "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses" (v. 4). This was in fact the meaning of a treaty, and still is to a degree. Treaties are comparable to marriages; they can be broken, but, until then, they require and presuppose a common faith and life.

Jehoshaphat, despite certain sins, was a godly man, and he insisted, "Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD today" (v. 5). As a result, Ahab went for the court preachers, *i.e.*, those ready to serve the crown, about 400 men. These prophets were syncretists: they tuned their word to the spirit of the age. The prophet Micaiah (whose name means, "Who is like Jehovah?") declared that God had sent a lying spirit into these false prophets in order to lead Ahab to his judgment.

Our Lord tells us that He is *the truth* (John 14:6). Moreover, all who are regenerated by His power and made a new creation have the Holy Spirit as their indwelling power. "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come" (John 16:13). When we know the Lord, we know His law-word; we can predict in terms of it that God's judgments will come to pass. The wages of sin is clearly death (Rom. 6:23).

False prophets are the sons, not of God, but of Satan, the great murderer of man, a liar, and the father of lies, according to our Lord (John 8:44). The ungodly "delight in lies" (Ps.

62:4). Isaiah 28:15 declares that the ungodly in principle have said:

> We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves.

God's word is the creative word: what God declares comes to pass. Man the sinner, seeking to be his own god, believes in his own word. For him, his word is the new reality, to be flung out against an alien world and made to stand. Lies are thus the foundation of the life of all unregenerate men. Reality must meet their imagination. God's world may puncture and invade their world of lies on a regular basis, but that word is rejected in favor of their word.

So it was with Ahab: he ascribed Elijah's word and now Micaiah's to *enmity*, to personal spite. He took precautions against that enmity of the Lord and His prophets by going into battle disguised.

Ahab was not lacking in courage. When wounded, he remained in his chariot and led the nation to apparent victory before withdrawing to die in defeat. Why? We have no word from Ahab, but we have his silence. Clearly, he knew that he was dying and that God's word is *truth*, and that God's judgment had come to pass. He accepted the death sentence in battle with fortitude and continued to lead Israel, though propped up in his chariot, and wheeled out of the front line while the battle continued. He showed himself to be a courageous man, but not a believer. He knew the judgment, but not the Lord of the judgment. He fought for victory on his own terms, not the Lord's.

Clearly, this narrative sets forth the certainty and the inevitability of God's word and judgment. It is the word of God which stands, not the word of man. The essence of humanism is the insistence that man as God must make his own word to stand. This means pitting the word of man against the word of God, which is exactly what sin always

does. The sinner may recognize that there is a God, but he believes that God's law-word and God's universe are full of loop-holes. These loop-holes must be explored and enlarged by man in order to gain freedom and growth.

The false prophets, like Zedekiah, the son of Chenaanah, find the true prophets blasphemous, irreverent, and intolerable. Zedekiah slapped Micaiah in professed indignation at his "blaspheming," even as an officer struck Jesus (John 18:22-23), and as the high priest Ananias commanded that Paul be slapped for blasphemy (Acts 23:1-5). These men used Exodus 22:28, which forbad reviling judges and cursing rulers, to deny the right to testify to God's truth.

In v. 38, we read, "They washed his armour," which Josephus and the Septuagint render differently. It is rendered by them that the harlots usually bathed or washed in the pool wherein Ahab's blood ran. The dogs also lapped up the blood. So died Ahab, whose word was revealed to be a lie, and over whom God's word of judgment was not only vindicated, but also most publicly set forth.

The army knew now of the judgment, as Ahab died in his chariot, and it quickly dispersed, crying out, "Every man to his city, and every man to his own country" (v. 36). The battle was no victory, and they were also in the presence of judgment, so that men left hurriedly. Earlier, Ben-hadad had sought to shame and break Ahab (1 Kings 20:1-6), but God had done it now, totally.

Ahab's life gives us a picture of weakness. To a great degree, this is both true and undeserved. Ahab was not the pawn of Jezebel: he used her to accomplish his own purposes while keeping his hands clean. He was an astute analyst of international affairs, and he was a master planner. Israel and his palace were wealthy under Ahab. But Ahab also had a great weakness. The syncretist seeks to keep a foot in both camps, but he has the strength of neither. Ahab lacked the hard drive of an openly ungodly man, and he had none of the strength of a covenant man. His weakness was a religious weakness: he

was a Laodicean to the core, a man dedicated to lukewarmness. Accordingly, our Lord spued him out (Rev. 3:14-16).

The Church today is Laodicean, as is the ministry. It is foreign to the living God; its god is an idea, or a kindly grandfather, not the God of Elijah. But the God of Elijah is the living God, and there is no other.

Chapter 11

The Judgments of the Lord

1. Then Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab.
2. And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease.
3. But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron?
4. Now therefore thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And Elijah departed.
5. And when the messengers turned back unto him, he said unto them, Why are ye now turned back?
6. And they said unto him, There came a man up to meet us, and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.
7. And he said unto them, What manner of man was he which came up to meet you, and told you these words?
8. And they answered him, He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite.
9. Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of an hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down.
10. And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.
11. Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly.

12. And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.
13. And he sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight.
14. Behold, there came fire down from heaven, and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties with their fifties: therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight.
15. And the angel of the LORD said unto Elijah, Go down with him: be not afraid of him. And he arose, and went down with him unto the king.
16. And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron, is it not because there is no God in Israel to enquire of his word? therefore thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.
17. So he died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken. And Jehoram reigned in his stead in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah; because he had no son.
18. Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? (2 Kings 1:1-18)

This is a story which embarrasses many commentators. They see it as representing a lower level of morality and a more primitive phase of revelation. It would seem that, to many of these men, there is no harm in killing people they dislike, *i.e.*, Communists, Nazis, Christians, racists, capitalists, or whatever else they regard as anathema, but God had better refrain from executing His enemies! The forbearance of God exceeds that of man, and, when He strikes, we had better believe that He does so in total justice, or we are rewriting the Bible into another word, man's word.

Ahaziah, king of Israel, was the son of Ahab and Jezebel. He lacked the ability of either of his parents and was simply evil.

Moab rebelled against Israel after Ahab's death, but Ahaziah apparently did not go into battle. He did not, however, escape injury, but his was of an ignominious sort. While in the upper area of the palace, he fell through a lattice and seriously injured himself.

Like a true pagan, he sought to know the future. He sent messengers to Ekron, the northernmost Philistine city, and thus closest to Israel, saying, "Go, enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease," or ailment. The Angel of the Lord required Elijah to confront these messengers, asking, "Is there no God in Israel, that you send to Ekron to inquire of their Baal? The word of the Lord to you is that you shall not rise from your bed but die.

Note that Ahaziah did *not* ask for healing but for fortune-telling or divining. Like a true pagan, he saw the future as a matter of fate, not responsibility. Saul, generations earlier, had gone to the witch of Endor with a like request, to know the future (1 Sam. 28). Today, the prevalence of astrology and witchcraft marks a similar flight from responsibility and morality towards an illusory form of knowledge.

But this is not all. Science offers a similar form of evasion. We are told by the humanists that knowledge is power, but the knowledge they seek is not God's truth, not moral knowledge, but knowledge of the future and how to control the future. Moreover, the control of the future desired is in opposition to God's declared counsel. Their mentality is a modern version of Ahaziah's outlook.

With this in mind, let us see what follows. The Lord makes it clear through Elijah that such a faith is an insult to Him and a declaration of war against Him, a will that God be dead. Modern man wills God to be dead and treats Him as non-existent. The Death of God School of "theology" in the 1960s did *not* say that God is dead, but rather, that God is dead *for us.* They held that, whether or not the God of Scripture is alive is a matter of indifference to us; *for us*, He is dead, because we rule that He is irrelevant to the world we are creating.

This is very much like Ahaziah. Ahaziah knew that the living God had decreed and predicted his father's death and its manner, and that He had also decreed the death of the entire dynasty. Ahaziah had seen God's word come to pass, but he chose to ignore it as nonexistent and irrelevant. Similarly, the modern humanist discards the testimony of Scripture and of the centuries to declare that God is irrelevant, and it is man's knowledge and decree which shall prevail.

Should not God declare war on this? The army of Israel was organized into thousands, hundreds, and fifties, each with an officer or captain (*sar*), as Num. 31:14, 48, and 1 Sam. 8:12 evidence. Two groups of fifties were sent out to capture Elijah, and God through Elijah destroyed them both. This is not a lower morality but the miraculous justice of God. It tells us that God, who repeatedly in history has confounded and destroyed the world's Ahaziahs, is unchanged and unchanging and wants us to know it. The elect are to cry out for justice, according to our Lord, and not to regard it as wrong (Luke 18:7-8).

But what of Luke 9:51-56? The rejection by Samaria reminds the disciples that Elijah had destroyed men of Samaria. Hence, they asked for fire from heaven to destroy Samaria. Our Lord rebukes them: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Does this mean that our Lord pronounced no judgment and destroyed no city or men? No, but Matthew 24 gives us His judgment on Jerusalem and Judea, *after* their full rejection of Him. Elijah's judgments came to pass after a life of witnessing. Our Lord first set forth salvation. By its rejection of Him, Judea gave itself over to destruction. Elijah and then Elisha, witnesses of that judgment, are set forth as a witness to the nation, but, like Pharaoh, the Israelites only hardened their hearts. As our Lord declares, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31). Then comes the judgment.

Elijah witnesses to Ahaziah, and Ahaziah dies unrepentant. The judgments on our generation are apparent daily, and yet

our generation continues unrepentant. Therefore, like Elijah and Elisha, we continue our witness. God's own elect will hear us, believe, obey, and rejoice. God's reprobate men refuse to believe, and God in His own time and way brings judgment. To be embarrassed or troubled by God's judgments is to be troubled and embarrassed by God and is a sin. Men do not want God interfering in their world. They say, in effect, let us do our own judging, killing, or saving. We are more judicious and wiser than Thou!

Should we then be surprised at God's judgments?

Ahaziah stayed out of battle with Moab and received a death-dealing judgment by falling out of a window! His father, also a reprobate, at least died on the battlefield. Neither, however, could escape God's judgment.

We either fight the Lord's battles, or, like Ahab and Ahaziah, we perish fighting our own.

Chapter 12

Why Peoples Perish

1. And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.
2. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said unto him, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel.
3. And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.
4. And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho.
5. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.
6. And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on.
7. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan.
8. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.
9. And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.
10. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.
11. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

12. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.
13. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan;
14. And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over.
15. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.
16. And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the LORD hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send.
17. And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not.
18. And when they came again to him, at Jericho, he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?
(2 Kings 2:1-18)

Here we have one of God's masterpieces of paradox. Ahab dies in a chariot; dogs lick up his blood, and the king's blood was washed off the chariot into a pool used by prostitutes for bathing. Elijah's last day is also marked by a chariot, a chariot of fire with horses of fire, to honor his ascension into heaven. The "whirlwind" which took Elijah was not a normal storm, but, as Snaith points out, the stormwind associated with the coming and presence of God the Lord, as in Isa. 29:6; 40:24; Ezek. 13:11; and Zech. 9:14. Only in Ps. 107:25 does the Hebrew word refer to a "natural" wind.[1] A chariot is connected with the end of each man's life on earth; with Ahab, it spelled the end of power, of his "ivory palace," and his

[1] Norman H. Snaith, "II Kings," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. III (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1954), 192.

planning, and it meant God's judgment. With Elijah, it meant vindication and God's great favor in his ascension without death.

It had been God's will that the lonely prophet served all his life, and God's will prevailed to the end. He had been a lonely man, and had cried out, "I, even I only, am left.... It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life." But the Lord never did. Now, at the end, in the company of Elisha, he finds that the need for solitude is deep in his bones, and he wants to be alone at the end. Earlier, God had denied Elijah companionship; now, He denied him solitude. Elijah had once prayed to die, and God never allows him to die, but takes Elijah bodily into heaven.

Elijah had been the prophet of judgment. Israel's syncretism had begun under Jeroboam I and the worship of the golden bull-calf; now it was mingled with Zidonian Baalism. Israel had gone into captivity to sin, into revolt against God, and Elijah's route now reverses Israel's entry into the Promised Land. *First*, he went to Bethel, to bid farewell to his young prophets there. Bethel, originally Luz, is the place where Jacob saw the vision of the ladder from heaven to earth, from God to man, not vice versa (Gen. 28:10-22). We meet Bethel again in Judges 20:18, 26; 21:2-4, and 1 Sam. 7:16; 10:3. It is the place of the altar of God, and of sacrifice. With Jeroboam I, it becomes a place of syncretism and idolatry (1 Kings 12:32-33, 2 Kings 10:29). Bethel was also the place where the reprobate youth mocked Elisha (2 Kings 2:23-24). The later prophets denounced Bethel for its idolatries (Jer. 48:13; Hos. 10:15; Amos 3:14; 4:4; 5:5-6; etc.) Hosea calls Bethel *Beth-aven*, not the house of God, but the house of nothing (Hos. 4:15; 5:8; 10:5). In this center for evil, Elijah plants his successor as God's witness.

Next, Elijah goes to Jericho, the point of entry into the Promised Land. Elijah here, too, had planted his spiritual sons. The prophet of judgment now retraces Israel's way back into the wilderness. Israel by its apostasy had only the wilderness ahead, as does every apostate generation. Moses had divided the Red Sea; now Elijah divides the River Jordan with his

mantle. By a miracle, God through Moses saved Israel. Now God's miraculous powers would judge and condemn Israel.

The ascension of Elijah reminds us of Christ's ascension, but with this difference: Elijah was carried up, while our Lord ascended in His own power.

Elisha cries out, as Elijah is taken, "My father, my father, the chariot (or chariots) of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (v. 12). The true power of Israel was not in Ahab, nor in his dynasty, but in the man of God, Elijah. This is still the case. The power today is not in Washington or Moscow, but in God's men of faith.

In terms of the Biblical law of inheritance (Deut. 21:17), Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit as his eldest son in the family and as his prophetic heir. This God granted to Elisha, who, on reaching the Jordan, divided the waters with Elijah's mantle.

Elijah, whose name, Eli-Jahu, means *Yhwh is God*, had been faithful to his name: the Lord was indeed always the only God for him. For Ahab and others, such a faith was not politically wise. A more tolerant and syncretistic religion was needed, Ahab believed, and one which saw good in all man's religious efforts. Elijah, like the God of Elijah, was the one whom rulers found it "wise" to forget. But they knew him and feared him. His word resounded in Israel and Judea, and we find reference to his letter, declaring God's judgment on Judah and Jehoram, in 2 Chronicles 21:12-20.

We last meet Elijah in this world at the Mount of the Transfiguration, where, with Moses, Elijah comes down to talk with Jesus Christ prior to His entry into Jerusalem and His crucifixion (Matt. 17:3). At this point, Elijah sees the coming final judgment on covenant–breaking Israel, as well as the birth of God's new Israel in Christ.

Elijah never died, although his life was a living death, in that his faith cut him off from the nation, and his knowledge of judgment colored his days. This lonely man has been a popular man with God's saints throughout the ages. Christian

intellectuals find him "too primitive" for their tastes, but he commands the imagination of God's faithful ones.

In Judaism, an empty chair for Elijah is set at the right of the godfather at circumcision ceremonies. In terms of Malachi 3:1, the prophet is called *the angel* or *messenger of the covenant.* At the Passover, a cup of wine is placed on the table for Elijah, which no man touches.

Our Lord declares that John the Baptist is the new Elijah (Mal. 4:5; Matt. 11:14; Lk. 1:17), and John, in dress, manner, and message, echoes Elijah and his ministry.

In Elijah's times, we see a sharp contrast, as in our own day, between the failing government of man and the unfailing government of God. Men undervalued righteousness and overvalued human ingenuity and diplomacy. According to the 1901 American Revised Version of Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint. But he that keepeth the law, happy is he." The reference to "vision" means a prophetic ministry which sets forth the law-word of God. If there be no such ministry, or if, as in Elijah's case, it is not heeded, in any and every age, *the people perish.* Shall we perish for lack of hearing ears?

Men today have no hearing ears for God's word, because they have "itching ears" for lies (2 Tim. 4:3). They are the sons of the devil by faith, children of the father of lies (John 8:44). The theology of the lie began with the Tempter's plan, "Ye shall be as God, knowing (or, determining for yourself) good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). The world, then, becomes whatever man wills it to be: it is his creation. Man sees his lie as a creative word. The result is "the power of positive thinking," "possibility thinking," "I'm okay, you're okay," "man shall prevail," "have faith in faith," and so on. All are examples of man's faith in his own word, in *the lie.*

Chapter 13

The Charge of Impotence

19. And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is naught, and the ground barren.
20. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him.
21. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land.
22. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.
23. And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.
24. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.
25. And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria. (2 Kings 2:19-25)

Miracles are not common in Biblical history, although they stand out because they command our attention. On the whole, the miracles tend to cluster around three eras: first, the time of the Exodus; second, the time of Elijah and Elisha; and, third, during the time of our Lord and the Apostles. In between, there are sometimes centuries without the witness of a single contemporary miracle.

Another fact appears. These three eras of miracles are also *times of judgment.* The Exodus Era is a time of judgment on Egypt and Pharaoh, on the faithless older generation of Israelites, and on the Canaanites. The age of Elijah and Elisha is a time of judgment on Ahab and Israel, and, secondarily, on Judah. Our Lord's day is a judgment again on Israel, but also on the sin of man.

All three eras are also *times of salvation.* With the Exodus, God's covenant people are redeemed from slavery and given the Promised Land. The Sabbath of the Old Testament era dates from the day of the first Passover, old Israel's day of salvation. In Elijah and Elisha's day, a remnant is prepared for the time of judgment on apostasy, and their deliverance enables them to become the nucleus of the renewed covenant. With Christ, the covenant is now set forth in all its salvific meaning by Christ's redemptive work, and He by His resurrection becomes the new Adam of the new creation, the King of a redeemed humanity.

There is a very striking difference between the events in the life of Elijah and the events in the life of Elisha. Elijah spoke to the king and to the nation, seeking to recall them from their apostasy. We are given specific information with respect to the setting and often the time of events. In Elisha's ministry, all such data with respect to the life of the nation is usually omitted as irrelevant. Elijah stands at the center of Israel's history in his time, as the great figure with whom the king and nation must contend. Elisha is as well known, at home and abroad, and perhaps even better known, than Elijah, but he is not the center of events. Instead of a chronological account, carefully dated or related to the social, political, and economic developments of that era, we are given a succession of episodes. This is not accidental. Elijah speaks to the straying, but still covenant nation. By the time of his death, the covenant is not with the apostate nation, but with a remnant. Elisha speaks to, and works with that remnant, and with the sons of the prophets, young men who are his sons in the faith and in training to be witnesses to the remnant. As Israel's apostasy deepens, the miracles abound, and the blindness of Israel to God is thereby stressed. They will not believe, though miracles happen all around them, because they prefer their way to God's way.

Elisha worked with three schools of the prophets, the seminaries of that day, at Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), Jericho (2 Kings 2:5), and Gilgal, (2 Kings 4:38). Because of a lack of space, the

Gilgal school was later transferred to the Jordan valley (2 Kings 6:2). Some of these students were married men, and others single, but the meals were eaten in common (2 Kings 4:1, 38-44). These men and Elisha were all involved in the life of Israel (2 Kings 9:1-13) and fought Baalism. The faithful remnant went to these schools as a substitute for the sanctuary on sabbaths and new moons (2 Kings 4:27), and they brought to the schools their tithes, firstfruits, and offerings (2 Kings 4:42). Later, as Amos indicates, these schools fell into the hands of degenerate men and by their garb indicated their office as well as the symbolic doom of the nation (2 Kings 1:7-8; cf. Isa. 20:2; Zech. 13:4; Matt. 3:4; 11:8; Heb. 11:37). In at least one instance, there was an anointing with oil and an investiture (2 Kings 9:1-6).

These men all faced a people and nation seeking naked power apart from righteousness and holiness. This was the essence of their Baalism. They were not denying the existence of God, but they were denying that God is realistic about man's needs. What the Lord requires of man is holiness and righteousness: this is the way to power with God and man in the Lord's purpose. But Baalism offered power directly and saw the Lord's requirements of holiness and righteousness as unrealistic, impractical, and, at times, suicidal.

The first of Elisha's two miracles sets forth the healing of the waters of Jericho. God's power over the natural world is made clear. The Lord is He who is the total governor over all things, physical and mental. The spring ran clear and pure as a result of Elisha's healing, and has done so since then.

The second miracle was at Bethel. Elisha was mocked by a large number of young boys, in ages possibly between six and twenty, according to C.J. Ball.[1] To curse God's prophet is to curse God (Deut. 18:19; cf. Lev. 24:10-16). These boys, shouting, "Go up, go up," to Elisha, were echoing the reports of Elijah's ascension, obviously treated as false and a laughing

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[1] C. J. Ball, "II Kings," in C.J. Ellicott, editor, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. III (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 108.

matter. They demanded of Elisha that he too "get lost" or disappear. Moreover, although Elisha was still a young man, they called him "bald head." We are told that the meaning of this is uncertain. This is not true. Many priests of antiquity were shaved bald to indicate their abdication from the life of normal men; in some cults, this was accompanied by ritual self-mutilation or castration. Into modern times, in the Near East, men wore a fez or skull-cap even in the house, so that neither their nor any other man's baldness would show. It was believed that baldness was a mark of impotence, so that baldness was covered under normal circumstances. To shave the head during mourning was related to this: it indicated a person's impotence before the fact of death and the sense of loss at a time of bereavement. Not only could priests in Israel never be eunuchs, but not even in mourning could they shave their heads (Lev. 21:5). Because they were the representatives of God, they could only symbolize God's omnipotence and transcendence to death and decay. A Nazirite, or a Levite upon purification (Num. 8:7), could shave their heads (Num. 6:18). For them, it was a symbolic sacrifice and purification by an abandonment of their own pride before God's sovereign grace, but the priest could never for a moment forget that he, whatever he was in himself, represented the omnipotence of God.

This makes clear the shouts of the boys. They told Elisha to get lost, to disappear, that he, his message, and his God were impotent and useless. Scripture gives us simply the heart of their jeering; obviously, it was raw and pornographic mockery, aimed at the God of Elisha who dared to say that the nation would perish. Elisha did as God required him to do: he cursed them. Two she-bears shortly came out of the woods and killed forty-two of the boys.

Jericho, once a city accursed, was now blessed by the Lord through Elisha. Bethel, once a place of blessing, now witnessed a curse. Holy places are where men today are holy unto the Lord, and where all their possessions are given over to His glory.

The Lord God at Bethel set forth the impotence, not of Elisha, but of Israel. It had no hope in itself, nor in its accursed posterity. Israel might believe that God's way is the way of foolishness, and man's way the way of power and potency, but the Lord confounded them in their arrogance and pride, "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:25). The many today who believe that God's law-word is the way of impotence had better beware. There is no escaping God's power. It is "as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him" (Amos 5:19).

Chapter 14

The Lost Victory

1. Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years.
2. And he wrought evil in the sight of the LORD; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made.
3. Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom.
4. And Mesha king of Moab was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool.
5. But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.
6. And king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time, and numbered all Israel.
7. And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab hath rebelled against me: wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle? And he said, I will go up: I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses.
8. And he said, Which way shall we go up? And he answered, The way through the wilderness of Edom.
9. So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days' journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them.
10. And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!
11. But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD, that we may enquire of the LORD by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.
12. And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the LORD is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

13. And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab.
14. And Elisha said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.
15. But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him.
16. And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches.
17. For thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts.
18. And this is but a light thing in the sight of the LORD: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand.
19. And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones.
20. And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water.
21. And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them, they gathered all that were able to put on armour, and upward, and stood in the border.
22. And they rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood:
23. And they said, This is blood: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another: now therefore, Moab, to the spoil.
24. And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them: but they went forward smiting the Moabites, even in their country.
25. And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees:

only in Kirharaseth left they the stones thereof; howbeit the slingers went about it, and smote it.
26. And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through even unto the king of Edom: but they could not.
27. Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to their own land. (2 Kings 3:1-27)

The death of King Ahab led to the revolt of Moab. Ahaziah, Ahab's eldest son, died after his fall through the lattice, and his brother Jehoram succeeded him. Jehoram abolished the Baal-images which his father had ordered to be made, but he did not at the same time abolish the calf-cult brought in by Jeroboam I. He thus struck at a newer form of syncretism, but left untouched the older and more popular form of it.

To aid him in this war, Jehoram summoned his ally Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, who brought along another ally, the King of Edom. The armies marched through an arid area, and they were soon without water for themselves and for the herds of cattle brought along for food. There was thus some danger that the weakened armies would fall prey to Moab. At this point, Jehoshaphat asked that a prophet be consulted, and it was discovered that Elisha had accompanied the armies. Elisha agreed to speak only because of Jehoshaphat's presence.

In normal warfare, no systematic destruction was permitted, as Deuteronomy 20:19-20 makes clear. Here, Elisha demands it, indicating that Moab is under God's ban. God would also provide water, and all the dry pools suddenly filled, apparently as a result of a storm at higher elevations in the mountains. (I myself have seen water appear suddenly on a clear day, in mountain country.) This occurred at the hour of the daily sacrifice in the temple at Jerusalem, a fact not lost on either Judah or Israel. Moreover, the waters, as they appeared, took on a red color, no doubt from the red sands through which they flowed.

The Moabites, seeing this in the early morning sun, allowed their hopes to father their opinions and concluded that the three armies had broken with one another and engaged in combat. This was a believable conclusion, given the rivalries, plus the presence of the intransigent prophet, Elisha. Military intelligence has never been lacking in history, and Elisha's presence was perhaps known, and certainly the hostility of Israel's dynasty to Elijah and Elisha, as well as the friendliness of Jehoshaphat, was common knowledge.

As a result, the Moabites left their capitol, Kir-haraseth, to wipe up the invading forces. This was a serious error. The capitol was at a strategic and easily defended location, very able to withstand a long siege. The crusaders later built a castle at Kerak, as it is now called, and it was only captured after a year-long siege that was accompanied by famine. Moab thus suffered a disastrous defeat.

The King of Moab responded, in this desperate crisis, by sacrificing his eldest son on the wall to their god, Chemosh. This was a practice common to several nations, especially the Phoenicians. In Israel, we have a related act of human sacrifice by Jephthah of his daughter (Judges 11:29-40), and later a very similar one by Ahaz, King of Judah, of his son (2 Kings 16:3). Micah makes a reference to this practice as epitomizing the falseness of certain approaches to God in: "Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Micah 6:7).

The King James Version then reads, "And there was great indignation against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to their own land" (2 Kings 3:27). The New English Bible renders it thus, "The Israelites were filled with such consternation at this sight, that they struck camp and returned to their own land." The meaning is not clear, except for this: "Great indignation" or "great wrath," according to C. J. Ball, is a phrase which "always denotes a visitation of Divine wrath (Comp. 2 Chron. xix.10, xxiv.18), "and he believed that, with

the sacrifice, the Moabites attacked and threw back the invaders."[1]

What are we to conclude? The preserving and prospering favor of God was manifested by the coming of the waters at the time of the morning sacrifice (see 1 Kings 18:36). Moab was placed under a ban, to be destroyed. Now, the victory over Moab is abandoned.

Given the syncretistic mentality of Israel, it is more than likely and almost certain that this act of human sacrifice had a profound affect on them, an equal if not greater affect than God's providential miracles on their behalf. When and where we are more afraid of man than of the Lord, and more awed by the acts of man than the acts of God, then and there we incur God's wrath and indignation. Men readily believe in the efficacy and power of man's acts. Man's acts are deliberately public: the human sacrifice was made, not in an inner temple or altar, but on the walls, before the invading armies. Men work before an audience, while the Lord works in terms of His own secret counsel and way.

Israel lost a victory handed to it by the Lord, because Israel believed more in the power of man's acts than in the power of God. Men today still lose victories given them by the Lord because they move in the fear of man.

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1. C.J. Ball, "II Kings," in C.J. Ellicott, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. III (Grand Rapids, MI), 112.

Chapter 15
The Honor of God

1. Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.
2. And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil.
3. Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few.
4. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full.
5. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out.
6. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed.
7. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.
8. And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread.
9. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually.
10. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.
11. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there.
12. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him.

13. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people.
14. And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old.
15. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door.
16. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid.
17. And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.
18. And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers.
19. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother.
20. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died.
21. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out.
22. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again.
23. And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to day? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath. And she said, It shall be well.
24. Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee.
25. So she went and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite:
26. Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well.
27. And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul

is vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.
28. Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?
29. Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child.
30. And the mother of the child said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her.
31. And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked.
32. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed.
33. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD.
34. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm.
35. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.
36. And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son.
37. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out.(2 Kings 4:1-37)

In 2 Kings 4:1-8:6, we have a series of miracles in the ministry of Elisha, all designed to strengthen the remnant while being a witness to the power of the Lord. In this section, we have two, in 2 Kings 4:1-7, the widow's cruse of oil, and in 2 Kings 4:8-37, the Shunammite and her son. These two miracles closely resemble those in the life of Elijah at Zarephath (1 Kings 17:1-24). In the same way, many of the apostolic miracles in Acts resemble those of our Lord in His ministry. The apostolic miracles demonstrated that Jesus Christ was alive and at work

in His disciples. Elisha's miracles set forth the fact that the God of Elijah was continuing His witness through Elisha.

There is a resemblance between the two miracles of Elisha and the two by Elijah at Zarephath, and there are many other parallels between the lives of the two men. But there is also a major difference. Elisha's life and ministry is more and more involved with the schools of the prophets and with the faithful remnant, whereas Elijah's great work was his confrontations with Ahab and Israel. Out of Elijah's confrontations a growing remnant had developed, and to these Elisha ministers.

The first miracle involved the widow of one of the students, whose husband's death left her in debt. A creditor came to take away her only asset, two boys, her sons, who would become bond-servants until redeemed or until the time of the jubilee (Lev. 25:39-41), if they chose to remain, or after six years under normal circumstances (Ex. 21:1-2).

The widow had no assets with which to forestall the creditor, and little in the house, save a flask or cruse of oil. Elisha ordered her to borrow as many flasks and containers as possible, and to pour oil into them from her cruse. As long as she had containers, the oil flowed miraculously. With this oil, she paid off her debts and saved her children.

In the second episode, a godly woman of wealth provided a separate quarter in her house for Elisha and Gehazi, his servant-son, whenever Elisha was in Shunem. The prophet blessed and rewarded her and her husband by declaring that the Lord would remove their childlessness. In due time, a son was born. Some years later, while working with his father at harvest time, he fell ill. A servant carried him home to his mother. About midday, the boy died. The woman said nothing of this to anyone, not even her husband, but laid the boy on the bed of Elisha in his private quarters. She then had an ass saddled for herself, and, with a servant, hurried to Elisha at Mount Carmel, where there was apparently another school. Briefly, Elisha returned with her, and the boy was miraculously restored to life.

Two things stand out in this narrative. *First*, the woman was a forthright and plain spoken person. Because of her faithfulness and help, Elisha offered to reward her and her husband. Elisha had followers in high places, and a word could be spoken through these friends to even the king. She wanted, however, neither special favors nor advancement, and her only answer was, "I dwell among my own people" (2 Kings 4:13). Gehazi, however, reported her hunger for a child to Elisha, who told the Shunammite that she would give birth to a son. Her answer was, "Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie to thine handmaid" (2 Kings 4:16). When her son died, she said to Elisha, on seeing him, "Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?" (2 Kings 4:28). She clearly implied that, by giving her a son and then taking him away, the Lord and Elisha had deceived her. She was very close to blasphemy, but Elisha did not rebuke her. Elisha made it clear to her that he knew nothing of what had happened (2 Kings 4:25-27). In spite of this bluntness, the woman also clung to Elisha as her one hope (2 Kings 4:30).

Second, there is the startling fact that she deliberately hid the death of her son from her husband and servants. If the death became public, Elisha's miracle and the Lord's blessing would be turned into mockery, and Elisha would have been widely defamed. Privately, she was blunt with Elisha to the point of rudeness. Publicly, she was totally concerned with his good name and the honor of the Lord. She was a woman who was a strong, if not a difficult friend, and one who would make a dangerous enemy.

It is interesting to note what this bold and outspoken woman does when her son is brought back to life: "Then she went in, and fell at his (Elisha's) feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out" (2 Kings 4:37). Silently, she worshipped the power of God manifested in Elisha, and then left. An amazing woman, this Shunammite, and the story crackles with the strong reality of her presence, still alive in its impact across the centuries. She believed the honor of God was at stake in her distress, and she acted

accordingly. Her reward was in harmony with her faith. She loved her son as much as her life and more, but it was the honor of God that governed her actions.

In both these miracles, God cares for His own. The Lord declares Himself to be the God of widows and orphans (Deut. 10:18), and of the weak and the helpless. Too few take Him at His word.

Chapter 16
God's Survivors

38. And Elisha came again to Gilgal: and there was a dearth in the land; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him: and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets.
39. And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage: for they knew them not.
40. So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof.
41. But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot.
42. And there came a man from Baalshalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat.
43. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the LORD, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof.
44. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the LORD.
(2 Kings 4:38-44)

We have two miracles here, both occurring during a time of famine.

In the first, the school of the prophets, facing hunger, resorted to seeking out wild vegetables to make a soup or stew. Edible gourds were a popular food of the people (Num. 11:5), whereas the plant picked by mistake by a student apparently foreign to that area was the colocynths, according to Keil and Delitzsch. According to C.J. Ball, this plant was a violent purgative; others have said that, in quantity, it could produce death. Thus, a serious mistake had been made. Because of the

food shortage, the students were especially vulnerable to the harmful effects of a poisonous plant.

Elisha immediately ordered his servant to add some meal to the pot. It was then served, and none were harmed, not even those who had already eaten of it. There was thus a miraculous conversion of poison to nutrition.

Ronald S. Wallace rightly saw the meaning of this miracle. In these two miracles, as well as that of 2 Kings 6:1-7, Elisha is a type of Christ, even as Elijah was a type of John the Baptist. As Wallace wrote, "As Elisha, by the power of God, was able to purge out the poison from the pottage which this zealous servant had made and cover his mistakes, so Christ's miraculous power can cover over the mistakes we all make in His service."[1]

There is more, however. A most serious error, to which we are all prone, is to view all events naturalistically. We assume that nothing more is present in our lives than ourselves and those around us. We suppose that our lives represent only a natural concurrence of forces, events, and persons, and we look at things humanistically. In our tunnel vision, we block out God, and we forget that every event comes from His hands. But, as Zechariah says, "Out of Him came forth the corner, out of Him the nail, out of Him the battle bow, out of Him every oppressor together" (Zech. 10:4). Our crises are of God's creating and in His sovereign purpose. God boxes us in to make us aware of the hopelessness of human vision. If we walk by sight, we will be miserable and pessimistic, and our best hope is a humanistic one.

Notice that the men, for the most part if not all, had already eaten the poisoned pottage. The meal added to the pot did not change what was in their stomachs. It simply signified that there is always more in our lives than we put into them, more in the pot than man provides. To view our lives humanistically is to give ourselves a taste of hell.

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[1] Ronald S. Wallace, *Elijah and Elisha, Expositions from the Book of Kings* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmmans, 1957), 121.

In the second miracle, a man from Shalisha, west of Gilgal, brought his tithe to the school of the prophets. Times were bad, and perhaps many were not tithing. Certainly this man's tithe was a modest one, and he had "reason" to believe that it was too insignificant to bother with. His tithe was twenty loaves of barley, and some full earns of "corn." This he brought in obedience to Deuteronomy 18:4-5 and Numbers 18:13, recognizing that the true priests of Israel were not in the order of the priesthood, but in Elisha's school.

But God had ordained that His work was to be provided for. The official "church" was syncretistic and compromising, and most adherents and leaders were apostate. God had ordained that His word must be proclaimed, and He provided the needs of His work, both naturally and miraculously. Men failed to support God's true ministry, and, though the gift of the man from Shalisha was small, God prospered that gift miraculously and fed some one hundred men. The parallel to the miraculous feedings of the multitude by our Lord is an obvious one, and it was not lost on the Judeans. They sought to take Jesus by force and compel Him to be their King (John 6:15). They saw Jesus as another Elisha, and, unlike Israel of old, were determined to do Him honor and to make Him King.

In this, they manifested their humanism, because they were accepting Jesus simply in terms of their needs, a free Judea. They had blinded themselves to any will or meaning from God the Father, or from Jesus Christ. They saw history as a closed system, one in which man alone provided the meaning. Hence, they accepted Jesus on their terms, not on His. Such an approach to Jesus Christ is commonplace today, and salvation is viewed in humanistic terms. Many evangelical groups stress what Jesus can do for you, rather than what Christ the Lord requires of us. "Sanctified" or sanctimonious humanism is still humanism.

When we are members of Christ's true body, we too are often like these sons of the prophets, bypassed by the world. But we are not bypassed by God. The world owes everything

to God, and He makes it clear that He will collect what is due to Him:

> Thus saith the LORD, The labour of Egypt, and the merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God. (Isaiah 45:14)

The world piles up wealth for God's Kingdom, but its action in this regard is one of hostility towards God and rebellion against Him. We are told, however, that even the wrath of man shall praise God (Ps. 76:10). Whatever man does God makes to work together towards His good, and the good of all them that love and serve God, His chosen ones (Rom. 8:28). In contrast, all things work together for evil for them who are enemies of God.

As Obadiah 15 declares: "For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou has done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head."

To seek to understand our lives naturalistically, or to seek to comprehend history within history, is to invite disaster. If our work is our work alone, it is meaningless. If it is the Lord's work, He will accomplish His purpose, for the government is upon His shoulder, and "of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end" (Isa. 9:6-7). Meanwhile, we have this promise: "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee, so that we may boldly say, The LORD is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5f.).

We live in one world, but are governed by another. To live so is not easy; to live otherwise is suicidal and impossible. It is well to remember, then, the words of Isaac Watts' hymn:

> Must I be carried to the skies
> On flowery beds of ease
> While others fought to win the prize
> And sailed through bloody seas?

Sure I must fight, if I would reign—
Increase my courage, Lord—
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy word.

The survivors are those who live in terms of God's word and kingdom, not man's.

Chapter 17
Miracles

1. Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper.
2. And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife.
3. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.
4. And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel.
5. And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment.
6. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.
7. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.
8. And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.
9. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.
10. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.
11. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.

> 12. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.
> 13. And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?
> 14. Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. (2 Kings 5:1-14)

The story here is a familiar one, and it is readily understood. A few details deserve additional attention. *Naaman* was an old Hebrew name (Num. 26:40), and its feminine form is *Naomi.* Names readily cross borders at times; Naaman himself was a Syrian.

Naaman was a pagan whom God had blessed; "by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria" (2 Kings 5:1). God's providential government is no respecter of persons or boundaries, and His blessings, too, are extended to all. Syria, as a buffer state against Assyria, was blessed by God and used for His purposes.

Naaman's leprosy was not sufficiently far gone to incapacitate him. Moreover, Syria lacked the quarantine laws which God had decreed through Moses. In Naaman's household, one young slave was a Hebrew girl, quite young, who had been taken in a Syrian raid into Israel. She was apparently well-treated and felt no small concern for Naaman's welfare. She spoke of the power of Elisha to heal, and she longed to see Naaman avail himself of that power.

Her comment was reported to the Syrian king, who greatly valued and honored Naaman. Accordingly, he ordered Naaman to go to Samaria and seek healing, and he sent a letter to the king of Israel to ask for this. His assumption was that Elisha would be an honored part of the court, not an outsider and a stranger. Naaman took with him gold and silver having a value, in terms of 1950, of $80,000, and worth much, much more now. The clothing, too, was very valuable.

The reaction of the Israelite king was one of shock and horror. He saw the letter as a provocation: it asked for a miracle as an excuse to wage war. Such pretexts were not uncommon. As H.L. Ellison pointed out:

> An example of such methods is when Apepi, the last Hyksos Pharaoh, picked a quarrel with his Theban vassal by complaining that the roaring of the sacred hippopotami in Thebes was disturbing his sleep in Avaris, more than 300 miles to the north! [1]

Elisha, then in Samaria, immediately intervened to offer his help. When Naaman arrived, Elisha did not meet with him. So that the emphasis and healing would be God-centered, Elisha simply sent a message out to Naaman.

The requirement was simple: Naaman must dip himself into the Jordan seven times. Naaman, who expected a dramatic exorcism-like scene, was angry. His servants persuaded him that the important thing was to seek healing, not a dramatic formality. Naaman obeyed, and he was healed.

The sevenfold bathing referred to the covenant of God with Israel. The number *seven* signifies fullness and was common as a covenantal symbol. Naaman's healing was to be a covenant work, and Naaman was to be brought into the covenant. Israel was facing judgment, captivity, and destruction. Naaman's healing and conversion thus represented the forthcoming ingathering of all peoples into the covenant.

We must turn again to the fact of miracles and their prevalence in the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Miracles are not evenly distributed throughout Biblical history. Generations and centuries pass at times without any miracles, and then, suddenly, there are many of them. Thus, after centuries, miracles suddenly become dramatically prominent with Moses in Egypt. The ten plagues were so great in scale that no one in Egypt could be ignorant of them. The

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[1] H.L. Ellison, "I and II Kings," in F. Davidson, A.M. Stibbs, and E.F. Kevan, editors, *The New Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1953), 320.

significant fact is that these miracles were not only a mighty witness to, and against Egypt, but also death for Egypt.

Israel's wilderness journey, after its deliverance from Egypt, was attended by many miracles, including manna, which was a witness six days in seven to God's miraculous power. The wilderness miracles witnessed against Israel to sentence a generation to die in the wilderness.

The conquest of Palestine included major miracles as well, and the conquest was followed by defeat and judgment for generations, as *Judges* makes clear.

The age of Elijah and Elisha was a remarkable era of miracles, and it preceded the destruction of Samaria and Israel, and marked the beginning of the Babylonian captivity.

Judea, then, became witness to the greatest miracles, those performed by Jesus Christ, and the consequence was the destruction of Jerusalem and Judea. Miracles and judgment go together. When God manifests His power in miracles, two things (among others) become manifest. *First*, God's power enters history to alter something on the human scene, dramatically and clearly. This miraculous power is fruitless in that it does not change men's headlong quest for judgment and destruction.

Our Lord says, at the conclusion of the Parable of Abraham, Lazarus, and the Rich Man in hell, that "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31). Shortly before His crucifixion, our Lord resurrected the real Lazarus, who had been dead four days (John 11:39). Here was a man who could speak concerning heaven and witness to Christ's power. The response of the leaders to this was to plan our Lord's death (John 11:44-53), and the people cried out for Christ's crucifixion (John 19:6). The greatest miracle, Christ's resurrection, also brought no healthy response.

Miracles thus witness not only to the power of God in history, but to the necessity for judgment and to the unregenerate hardness of men's hearts. Miracles precede

judgment and witness to the stubborn and determined rebellion of men. Hence, as David says, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Ps. 14:1). The fools of every age are doomed men.

Chapter 18
The Practical Faith

15. And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant.
16. But he said, As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused.
17. And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD.
18. In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing.
19. And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way. (2 Kings 5:15-19)

Naaman, after his healing, returned in gratitude to thank Elisha and to present him with his gifts. As he meets with Elisha, two things stand out. *First*, and foremost, Naaman is now a regenerate man. More than his body has been made whole. Joyfully, he speaks of his new understanding; nowhere in all the earth is there the worship of the true God but in Israel. Naaman's worship and service is henceforth to be to the true God, and to Him alone.

Second, Naaman manifests, as we have seen, gratitude, both to God and to man. He will henceforth worship God alone, and offer burnt offerings and sacrifices to Him and to none other. He is also grateful to Elisha, and eager to bestow on him the costly gifts of gold, silver, and raiment which he had brought. We are reminded, in this incident, of our Lord's healing of ten lepers. Of these ten, only one, a Samaritan, returned to thank Jesus and give glory to God (Luke 17:11-19).

Elisha refused the gifts. He did not thereby imply that such gifts were always wrong. In this case, Elisha rejected the gift in order to keep central the faith. A foreigner, Naaman was now in his first contact with a man of God. Elisha isolated Naaman in terms of his new faith. Naaman would be alone in Syria, a member of God's covenant but with no covenant fellowship. Elisha's prophetic ministry required tithes and offerings. The prominent woman of Shunem provided him with housing. The man from Baal-shalisha brought his first-fruits, and so on (2 Kings 4:9-10, 42). Naaman's case was different. There was no ongoing ministry to Naaman, and there was a need for Naaman to stand alone. If this gift had been received, Naaman would have sent further gifts, and this might well compromise his place in Syria. To send gifts to a foreigner under a hostile king could become a serious matter.

The central point in this story has to do with Naaman's presence in the temple of Rimmon, *the thunderer*, a pagan god. The king was apparently infirm. In going to the temple, he required the presence of a trustworthy man to lean on. In such a position, assassination was easy, and not uncommon in antiquity. The attendant had to be, *first*, a totally trustworthy man. The king could have no doubts concerning him. For Naaman now to refuse would create very serious problems. There was more than ritual at stake. The question was one of trust, essential trust. *Second,* such a person had to be strong and able, a competent defender of the king against attacks. Naaman's presence with the king was a part of his high role in Syrian affairs and inseparable from it. A man who could not be trusted next to the king could not be trusted to command Syria's army.

Elisha's answer, approving of Naaman's request and position, is dealt with unfairly by many commentators. It is seen as evidence of the "lower" character of Old Testament morality. Such a position is blasphemous and offensive.

First of all, Naaman was very sensitive to the problem, as much and more so than any man today. He feared that it might

involve him in pagan worship, and he wanted no part of any other god.

Second, in spite of his determination to worship God alone, Naaman did not even consider refusing to enter the temple of Rimmon with the Syrian king. His concern was God's understanding and grace. This is most important. Naaman was a man of responsibilities; it did not occur to him to abandon those responsibilities in the name of a pietistic holiness. His new faith only made him more sensitive to his duties. His intention was wholly godly, and he was assuring Elisha of that fact. When he bowed to Rimmon, it was only because he had to help the king bow to him.

Elisha's answer was, "Go in peace." The pietistic answer involves a misuse of Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 5:22, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." The word in Greek is *eidos*, the form or shape of something, *i.e.*, its reality, its actual appearance. In the English, we can read this sentence in two ways. *First*, the false but popular pietistic reading is, Avoid everything that looks like evil to someone. This would require us to avoid doing anything which someone could misconstrue. Such an interpretation radically warps Paul's meaning. *Second*, "appearance" can mean the actual appearing or presence of something. It, then, refers not to what someone might think, but to what actually is. Thus, we are required to abstain or avoid the realities of evil; we are not to involve ourselves with such realities.

In the house of Rimmon, Naaman was not worshipping Rimmon; he was doing his duty to the king. To sacrifice an important work because someone might misinterpret what Naaman was doing was hardly godly. This pietistic perspective has, however, led to the irrelevance of many churchmen to the world around them. If we begin to move in terms of appearances as the false imaginations of others, we move from reality into a world of shadows and irrelevance.

Finally, both Naaman and Elisha are abused because Naaman asked to take two mule loads of earth from Elisha's

place of residence. Elisha granted Naaman permission to take the earth. This is called superstition by people who are in no position to condemn either Elisha or Naaman. Their comments are presumptuous.

Quite regularly now, American tourists, devout fundamentalists, are baptized in the river Jordan. I was once asked by a couple to baptize their grandchild with water brought from the Jordan. Was this superstitious? Emphatically not so. It represents a desire for closeness to the place and land of our Lord's earthly life. Men sometimes keep their father's hat, for example, on their closet shelf long after his death, to gain a sense of closeness.

Modern man is too ready to call everything he does not do, superstition, and everything he does, reason. At best, such an attitude is foolish. At heart, it represents an unwarranted pride. Such people, like Job's sorry comforters, assume that they are The People, and that wisdom was born with them, and will die with them (Job 12:1-2).

Chapter 19

Leprous Wealth

20. But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.
21. So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well?
22. And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.
23. And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him.
24. And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed.
25. But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither.
26. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?
27. The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow. (2 Kings 5:20-27)

As we have seen, the ages of miracles have also been times of judgment and the death of a culture. The destructions of Egypt and Canaan were preceded by many great miracles. The death of Israel was preceded by the miracles of Elijah and Elisha, and the death of Judah, by the miracles of our Lord. Miracles demonstrate the hardness of men's hearts. Our Lord says, "If

they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31). The issue is not proof or evidence, but faith. The unregenerate deny and suppress the evidence, even denying the greatest of miracles.

We have a miracle in this text, but a grim one.

Oriental courtesy requires reluctance in receiving a gift, and hence, when Gehazi went after Naaman, he exploited this fact. Gehazi asked for only a modest portion of the total gift, although it was enough to make him a very rich man. Not only was his act a dishonest one, but, as H.L. Ellison noted, "it removed from Naaman's heart the picture of a God and His prophet who gave him healing as an act of pure grace."[1]

Naaman jumped down from his chariot to greet Gehazi, "a remarkable act of deference from a man of Naaman's rank to a servant."[2] It was Naaman's way of showing respect for Elisha. Moreover, Naaman urged Gehazi to take more silver than he had asked, and two servants were assigned to carry the gifts. Gehazi's fearfulness at allowing them entrance into Elisha's house may have alerted the servants as to Gehazi's dishonesty, and, in turn, Naaman also.

Gehazi hoped to use the loot to establish himself as a landed and wealthy man. He planned to have olive orchards, vineyards, sheep, cattle, and many servants. He had shrewdly limited his request. Two students of Elisha had arrived, he said, and both were needy. Would Naaman help them? Elisha was, Gehazi said, asking nothing for himself, only something for the Lord's work.

By God's miraculous grace, Elisha knew exactly what Gehazi had done. When Gehazi was confronted with this, he denied it. Elisha then not only revealed that he knew of Gehazi's act, but also of his plans for an estate. Gehazi wanted

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1. H.L. Ellison, "I and II Kings, in F. Davidson, A.M. Stibbs, and E.F. Kevan, editors, *The New Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1953), 320.
2. J. Robinson, *The Second Book of Kings* (London, England: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 55.

wealth; he would get wealth, but with leprosy. Moreover, the hereditary wealth he sought to establish for his posterity would carry with it a hereditary curse, leprosy.

This is a grim story, and all too true. It tells us plainly that actions have consequences. Our humanism wants consequences to stop with one man, but Adam's sin has had its consequences for all his humanity. God's world is a consequential realm, and only God's regenerating grace can break the chain of events.

Our humanism at most wants Adam punished, but his seed to enjoy the Garden of Eden. It wants Gehazi brought to account, perhaps, but why his "innocent children?" We are none of us born into innocence; we are born into our father's world and all that he made it to be. That world cannot change until God changes it, and our protests against the consequential nature of God's world show how lightly we take sin. "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God," says The Shorter Catechism, echoing especially 1 John 3:4, "sin is the transgression of the law." The law is God's fundamental order of being. Sin is warfare against that order. Gehazi by his act held that Elisha was a fool and that Elisha's power was inferior to his own wisdom. Gehazi saw promotion as coming from his own self-interest rather than God's intercession. Asaph's psalm tells us:

> 6. For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south.
> 7. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.
> 8. For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them. (Ps. 75:6-8)

Men are convinced that promotion comes by their wisdom, law, and devices. "But God is the judge." He gives to all who are so minded His wine of judgment. Because of their self-delusion, they drink this condemnation even to its bitterest

dregs. They are too self-blinded to see the insanity of their ways.

God's judgment is not without its paradox. Psalm 106:15 says of Israel in the wilderness that God "gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul." Elisha did *not* force Gehazi to surrender his dishonest gain. Gehazi left *with* his wealth, to buy his land, and, with his money, to get a wife. Every time his wife submitted to him, knowing he was a leper, it was a judgment on Gehazi, as was the leprosy of his progeny. God gave him his heart's desire and sent leanness into his soul.

Naaman went his way, a healed man. Elisha was hurt by his servant's sin, but went on in the Lord's work, and to ever greater service. Gehazi went on to a living hell.

This is a miracle, and a grim one. If we look at the world around us, we shall see many such providential acts of judgment whereby the ungodly, who exploit God's people and name, are confounded and given only leprous wealth.

Our current, inflationary, and abortionist era is marked by leprous wealth. The many who seek it are the heirs of God's curse.

Chapter 20
The Lost Axe-Head

1. And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us.
2. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye.
3. And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go.
4. So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood.
5. But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed.
6. And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim.
7. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it. (2 Kings 6:1-7)

This is not a popular miracle. Modern man believes in miracles by man. In *The Mythology of Science*, I cited some of the miracles scientific man expects to perform: the abolition of death, the creation of a new sun when the old one dies, and so on. But the humanist will not allow God the privilege of making an iron axe-head to float.

The school of the prophets, *i.e.*, the seminary for the training of ministers and teachers of God's law, had become too small for the students. The commons could no longer adequately hold the students, and some kind of solution was necessary. A number of the students therefore suggested a new location. The students lived in various dwellings in the area, and, as 2 Kings 4:1 makes clear, some were married. The existing common hall may have been a facility rented or loaned to them. There was need now for more room.

A new location on the Jordan was suggested to Elisha, and he agreed. It was agreed that each student would cut down a log

in order to have the material for the construction of a new building. There were, apparently, a considerable number of students. We are not given the specific location by our historian. The school may in time have become apostate, and hence its name is omitted.

Elisha agreed to go with the students to the new location, even though it was, perhaps, a little distance from his home. Once there, the students began to cut down trees to build the instruction hall. In the course of work, one student's axe-head came loose and fell into the river. An iron axe-head was, for a student, a costly item. In this particular case, it was borrowed. The student was thus upset, and he cried out to Elisha. Elisha cut down a stick, threw it into the area where the axe-head had fallen into deep waters, and the axe-head floated to the top. The student then reached out and took the axe-head.

Such a thing, falling into a running stream, is easily lost. The sand, disturbed by the axe-head, is moved by the currents and quickly covers any object.

An axe-head is lost, and said axe-head is recovered. One commentator has seen this incident as simply designed to show the supernatural power and miracles associated with Elisha. The fact is that Elisha is very much in the background here and is incidental to the episode. In fact, Elisha's name is not even once cited in these verses, after verse 1, although it appears in the previous chapter, and in the verses which follow, *i.e.*, 2 Kings 6:8-33. The narrative changes here, and Elisha, after verse 1, is referred to only as "the man of God." The student who lost his axe-head is the focus of attention; he is a person of little note, as his name is omitted. Like the millions of us who live and die, he was known only to God after his lifetime.

Thus the purpose of this passage is to show us that what some regard as a trifling miracle, occurs to a person of little account. This incident comes immediately after Naaman's miraculous healing and before the great miracle which occurred when an attempt was made to seize Elisha. This axe-head miracle is thus intended for us. God is at work, not only

in the halls of the mighty, but in the lives and needs of those whom the world sees as of no account.

For a poor student in those days, an iron axe-head was an important matter. The funds to replace it would not have been readily available. God is revealed as concerned and mindful of our humblest needs. We need not be a great prophet, a general, or a king, to be the concern of our heavenly Father.

We are thus forbidden to limit the power and the providence of God to past history, to the great figures of history, or to His very important saints. Our Lord says,

> 29. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.
> 30. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.
> 31. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:29-31)

The world, our Lord makes clear, does not value sparrows. It regards things like axe-heads as trivialities, and, in every age, there have been those ready to toss into a trash-heap what others would treasure. Neither then, nor now, is the student's minor and private little disaster or grief of any concern to men and governments. What we are told here very plainly is that there is no concern too small for God. We all have our lost axe-heads which are trifles to the world, but a grief to us. We have an obligation to know that nothing is too great or too small for the Lord, and we need to bring our lost axe-heads to the Lord in prayer.

The New Testament tells us that Elijah is the precursor and type of John the Baptist (Mal. 4:5; Matt. 11:14, 16:14; Luke 1:17, 9:8,19; John 1:21). Elisha is a type of Christ, and his miracles therefore take us into the realm of the supernatural in a way which points to Christ and His work. Both men are types of judgment and grace and ministers thereof. The God who restores our axe-heads is also the God of judgment. The two go together. Only because God is a God of total concern, to whom the sparrows and the hairs of our head are important,

is He both the God of judgment and the God of mercy. Nothing escapes His notice and government.

Chapter 21

The Army on the Mountains

8. Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp.
9. And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down.
10. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice.
11. Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel?
12. And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.
13. And he said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan.
14. Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about.
15. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?
16. And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.
17. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.
18. And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.
19. And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria.

> 20. And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.
> 21. And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them?
> 22. And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.
> 23. And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel. (2 Kings 6:8-23)

This is a magnificent account, and one which should be a very present reality to us.

To force Israel into Syria's grand alliance against Assyria, the Syrian monarch decided to send a detachment of men, comparable to modern commandos, into the territories of Israel. Through spies in the Israelite palace, he knew when and where the king would travel, and he made plans to attack and kill him on the way. By this means, Israel would be rendered leaderless and therefore amenable to pressure to join Syria's alliance as a satellite state.

Elisha, empowered by God, was made aware of all the various ambushes set by Syria, and each time notified the king of Israel. As a result, the Syrian king was sure that a traitor in his own household or troops was notifying Samaria of all his plans. In fact, however, some loose-tongued people in the Samarian palace had talked of the matter, so that word had spread, in exaggerated fashion, to the spies, and to Damascus. Elisha was given credit for the power to hear the very words spoken in his bedroom by the Syrian king, an uncomfortable thought!

Orders were thus given to the commandos to seize Elisha at Dothan, and, during the night, they surrounded the city.

Terrified, Elisha's servant told Elisha of this fact. Elisha prayed that his servant's eyes be opened to see God's hosts around them, horses and chariots, to wit, *fire*, the emblem of God's presence in power and judgment.

The Syrian commandos were supernaturally left dazed and stupefied. Elisha offered, as a stranger, to lead them to Elisha and the right city. In fact, he led them into the center of Samaria.

The Israelite king was in favor of executing all the Syrians at once. He would not kill prisoners in war-time; how could he do so now? They were, moreover, Elisha's prisoners. Elisha ordered that they be fed and released. No further such sorties were made by Syria.

An important fact is Elisha's lie to the Syrian commandos. Like Rahab in Jericho, and the Hebrew midwives in Egypt, he saw no morality in telling the truth to men determined to do evil and murder. The perfectionists who look down on Rahab and the midwives must, logically, condemn Elisha as well. *God does not.* Truth must serve God and His justice, not evil.

Another very important fact is the presence of the heavenly hosts. It is not their presence which is remarkable, but the fact that Elisha's servant saw them. This was not the first time such a sight was possible for men. According to Genesis 32:1-2, when Jacob went to meet his brother Esau, who was determined to kill him, God's angels protected him:

> 1. And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.
> 2. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

Mahanaim means *two camps*; Jacob was referring to the fact that two groups were present there, his group, and the heavenly host, so that he moved towards Esau with a double host.

Several texts speak of this fact of an unseen defense as basic to our lives:

> The angel of the LORD encampeth around them that fear him, and delivereth them. (Psalm 34:7)
>
> He shall defend thee under his wings: thou shalt be safe under his feathers; his righteousness and truth shall be thy shield and buckler. (Psalm 91:4)
>
> He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. (Psalm 91:11)
>
> And I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more; for now have I seen with mine eyes. (Zechariah 9:8.)
>
> ...the angel of his presence saved them...and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. (Isaiah 63:9)

What happened to Elisha was not altogether unique; the fact that the heavenly army was seen *is* unique. God's angels guard us, although we do not see it. The protection is always there, but not on our terms. We must remember that the greatest evil is neither suffering nor death, but a failure to believe and to grow in faith.

The world we live in, and also the invisible world which surrounds us, are both very real, and we dare not downgrade the reality of either. We must remember, however, that the determinative order is God and His counsel. Every life is held in God's hands, and all things are ordained by His wisdom and will; every word spoken, every step taken, and every work done by us is in virtue of a power not our own. He who gives us both the new life and the power has made us His sons and daughters by the adoption of grace, and the Lord protects His own family and possession.

Earlier, fiery chariots and horses had parted Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2:11-12), and now a like power surrounds Elisha to protect him.

The term "chariots of fire" has rightly passed into the language as a term for supernatural power. Syria had sent horses and chariots to destroy Elisha; God had His own forces,

in comparable format but with supernatural power, poised to defend Elisha.

Israel was a condemned nation, but God, in remarkable ways, continued to defend Israel and to witness to the peoples. As we face like people, profligate and unrepentant in their ways, we must not fear; Elisha's word stands: "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (v. 16).

Lord, open the eyes of Thy people, that they may see!

Chapter 22

Miracle Outside the Walls

24. And it came to pass after this, that Ben-hadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria.
25. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver.
26. And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king.
27. And he said, If the LORD do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress?
28. And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow.
29. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son.
30. And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh.
31. Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day.
32. But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him; and the king sent a man from before him: but ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head? look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door: is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?
33. And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him: and he said, Behold, this evil is of the LORD; what should I wait for the LORD any longer? (2 Kings 6:24-33)

1. Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.
2. Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.
3. And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?
4. If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.
5. And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there.
6. For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us.
7. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life.
8. And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it.
9. Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household.
10. So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them, saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were.

11. And he called the porters; and they told it to the king's house within.
12. And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants, I will now shew you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we be hungry; therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city.
13. And one of his servants answered and said, Let some take, I pray thee, five of the horses that remain, which are left in the city, (behold, they are as all the multitude of Israel that are left in it: behold, I say, they are even as all the multitude of the Israelites that are consumed:) and let us send and see.
14. They took therefore two chariot horses; and the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying, Go and see.
15. And they went after them unto Jordan: and, lo, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste. And the messengers returned, and told the king.
16. And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD.
17. And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said, who spake when the king came down to him.
18. And it came to pass as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, Two measures of barley for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, shall be to morrow about this time in the gate of Samaria:
19. And that lord answered the man of God, and said, Now, behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.
20. And so it fell out unto him: for the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died. (2 Kings 7:1-20)

The siege of Samaria was a grim one. The sieges of walled cities from antiquity through the siege of Paris in the Franco-Prussian War have been ugly tales of famine, cannibalism, and the erosion of civilized behavior. The horrors of sieges soon

reveal how real men's faith is. Too often, the niceties of civilized behavior give way to rampant evil.

In Scripture, judgments are the prelude to salvation *if* the judged repent of their apostasy. If men are ready to learn from judgment, salvation follows; if not, then reprobation ensues. In judgment, God gives men and nations another opportunity.

The famine in Samaria reached the point that an ass's head sold for eighty pieces of silver, and "the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver." "Dove's dung" has not been clearly identified, but it may have been a week's amount. The fourth part of a cab is half a pint.

At the same time, cannibalism began to appear. Two women, to survive, decided to eat their sons; after the first had sacrificed her son to their hunger, the second woman hid her son to save him. The first woman appealed to the king.

The king's reaction was first shock and then anger against God for allowing such things to happen, and for allowing Israel to experience these horrors. Unable to strike at God, the king decided to strike at Elisha and to have him executed. Elisha ordered the doorway to be barred to the king's messenger until the king himself, coming also, arrived. The king, on arriving, announced his anger against God: "Behold, this evil is of the LORD; what should I wait for the LORD any longer?" (2 Kings 6:33). Clearly, Elisha had counseled Israel to have faith in, and wait on their covenant God. The king saw this as futile: God was worthless to him if God refused to spare him judgment.

Elisha then prophesied that in about twenty-four hours, a measure of fine flour, and two measures of barley, would be sold in the gate of Samaria for a shekel each. Given the situation, this seemed to be a ridiculous statement. A lord next to the king commented sarcastically, "Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" Elisha answered, "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." (2 Kings 7:2).

That evening, four starving lepers outside the gate decided to beg food of the Syrians. At worst, they might be killed, but death from starvation was theirs if they did not act. At best, some food might be tossed their way.

Going to the Syrian camp, they found it abandoned. God, had during the night, caused the Syrian army to hear the approaching sounds of a vast army, and the Syrians, assuming that both Hittites and Egyptians had come to Israel's rescue, abandoned camp and fled in terror. The lepers ate and seized gold, silver, and clothing for themselves, which they took away and hid. Later, they decided to tell their own people in Samaria of the abandoned camp. The court was suspicious and assumed an ambush. However, a scouting party was sent out, and it returned to confirm the leper's report.

In the mad rush by the people within the walls to seize the abandoned food, wealth, and supplies, the sarcastic lord was trampled to death by the mob.

The episode is a revealing one. In the horrors of the siege, the curses of the law in Leviticus 26:29 and Deuteronomy 28:53, 57, had been literally fulfilled. The king, Joram, Ahab's son, did not recognize the judgment as one which was deserved, nor did he turn to the course of obedience to gain God's blessing. Rather, he turned all the more against God. He did not punish the cannibalistic women; instead, he sought to punish Elisha. Perhaps only because the elders of Israel were with Elisha did he refrain from having Elisha killed on the spot. Joram's statement, "What should I wait for the LORD any longer?" (2 Kings 6:33) is revealing. For Joram, man is sovereign, and, if God does not serve man, then man can turn away from God. God must deserve man's allegiance and worship, in Joram's thinking.

The doubting lord was trampled underfoot. So it is with God's wonder-working providence in every age. The doubters are trampled under foot by the onrush of God's miraculous dealings. In due time, Joram himself died, slain by Jehu. He witnessed miracle after miracle and saw nothing.

The deliverance of Samaria is notable. It was predicted by Elisha, and it was both supernatural and thoroughly natural. The ungodly could see the entire incident as a happy accident and thereby evade the facts of both judgment and deliverance. So much of history is like this. We can blind ourselves to God's judgments and thereby invite the totality of reprobation, or we can see all history as God's providential shaking of men and nations.

A miracle had taken place outside the walls of Samaria. Judgment was in process within the city. Samaria's days were numbered, and a greater power than Syria would bring down a greater judgment upon Israel.

Chapter 23
The Nameless King

1. Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the LORD hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years.
2. And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God: and she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years.
3. And it came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines: and she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land.
4. And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done.
5. And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life.
6.And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now.
(2 Kings 8:1-6)

Elisha told the Shunammite woman, apparently now a widow, to leave Israel because of a forthcoming famine. There could have been other and political reasons for this counsel, but a judgment was clearly coming in the form of a famine of seven years. We need *not* assume, as so many scholars do, that the number seven is symbolic, and not literal. The land was to have its Sabbath rests every seventh year, and Israel had not kept the law. Hence, a seven year famine was a reminder of God's law and the reason for the judgment (Ex. 23:10-11; Lev. 25:1-7, 20-22; etc.).

The woman obeyed Elisha and went to Philistia for the duration. This is paradoxical, because normally Philistia was a drier area.

At the end of the drought, the woman returned to Israel, only to find that others had occupied her house and were using her land. Because of the drought, grazing was poor and limited, and outsiders had taken over her land to get all possible benefits from that additional acreage.

Unable to dispossess them by means of the local courts, she went to Samaria to appeal to the king. The gates of a city were in those days both a marketplace and a court. There the king sat to hear appeals. He had asked Gehazi, the former, and now leprous servant of Elisha to give him a report on Elisha's miracles. Elisha was currently not available, or in hiding. To ask about Elisha was in effect to ask for a miracle in a time of judgment. In the king's mind there was this question, What has Elisha done in the past, and what can he do now?

Elisha, we must remember, was Elijah's chosen successor. It was Elijah who had called down a most fearful drought on Israel. Had Elisha invoked this one? How should Elisha be dealt with?

Gehazi told the king of the restoration of life to the dead son of the woman of Shunam. At that moment, the widow appeared before the king. Gehazi, as a leper, stood further out and was thus in a position to spot her, and he said, "My lord, O King, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life." The king at once appointed an officer to take charge of the restoration of the widow's land to her, with full restitution.

Two things are immediately noticeable. *First*, the king is eager to help a widow who is a closer friend of Elisha. There is no investigation; he is sure that the widow is in the right. The widow's absence at Elisha's counsel points to at least Elisha's foreknowledge of the drought. The king has no desire to offend Elisha or the widow. In fact, he is eager to please them.

Second, we are not given the king's name, although scholars have made it clear that there are two possible monarchs whose dates make tenable their part in this episode. Whichever of the two it was, the more important fact is that he is deliberately left *nameless.* Of this king, it can be said that he was a better man than Ahab, which is not saying too much. More important, he was not as significant a ruler as Ahab.

We readily remember the Roman emperors before and after Nero; however evil they were, Rome then still had a future, although by the end of the first century Rome was moving into an economic decline from which she *never* recovered. It is difficult for us to remember, however, more than one, at most, of the last four or five emperors before Rome fell to the barbarians. They may have been better men than Nero and Caligula, for example, but they were *irrelevant* men.

After Ahab, the kings of Israel were irrelevant men. They did not so appear in their day, and, somewhat later, Jeroboam II established Israel in what seemed to be her greatest glory. It was, all the same, a superficial and decadent power, and Scripture gives it only brief attention. Jeroboam II (787-747 B.C.), the fourteenth king of Israel, added to the territories of the realm. He was popular; his reign was one marked by a superficial wealth, and art flourished. Within a few years after his death, Israel was conquered and destroyed.

In Scripture, Jeroboam does not gain either the attention or the approval which was his in that day (2 Kings 13:4-6; 14:23-28; Hosea 1:1-2; 4:12-14; 13:2-3, 5-7; Amos 1:3-5, 13, 2:1-3, 6:7; 7:9, 13, 17). The fortifications for Samaria which Jeroboam II built were as much as thirty-three feet wide, and it took the Assyrians three years to seize the city (2 Kings 17:5). For his time, for his people, and for the other nations of his day, Jeroboam II was seen as Israel's greatest monarch, but, in Scripture, he receives attention on a scant level when compared to Ahab. The Bible depicts Jeroboam II as the end of the road for Israel; we hear of him, and then of his miserable successors, only as harbingers of the last days of Israel, and of the final phase of God's judgment.

There is, thus, no mention of the specific king in these verses. He is an inadequate and irrelevant man. There are improvements in Israel, but no true reformation. Israel's future has become death, and the prophets minister to a remnant.

Chapter 24
Expediency

7. And Elisha came to Damascus; and Ben-hadad the king of Syria was sick; and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither.
8. And the king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and enquire of the LORD by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?
9. So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him, and said, Thy son Ben-hadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?
10. And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the LORD hath shewed me that he shall surely die.
11. And he settled his countenance stedfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept.
12. And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child.
13. And Hazael said, But what, *is* thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The LORD hath shewed me that thou *shalt be* king over Syria.
14. So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master; who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me *that* thou shouldest surely recover.
15. And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took a thick cloth, and dipped *it* in water, and spread *it* on his face, so that he died: and Hazael reigned in his stead.
(2 Kings 8:7-15)

The presence of Elisha in Syria should not surprise us. God had called Israel, not for its own sake, but for His purposes, and it was required to be a missionary people. The extent to which this task was fulfilled appears in Psalm 87, and in 2 Chronicles 6:32-33. In Jonah, we see another instance of this same mandate.

The king, Ben-hadad, son of the god Hadad, was very seriously ill. He ordered a close aide, Hazael, to go to Elisha, "the man of God," and to ask, "Shall I recover of this disease?" Hazael was to take with him forty camels carrying gifts. According to the custom of the times, this was ostentation and honor, even more than a gift. One small gift per camel was not uncommon. The parade of camels attracted notice and did honor to the recipient. We are not told that Elisha accepted these gifts, especially since verse 11, in Moffatt's paraphrase, reads, "As he spoke, the man of God's face became rigid with horror, absolute horror. Then he burst into tears." Elisha had no desire for any bond with Hazael.

Elisha said, tell the king he shall recover, knowing that Hazael intended to say so in any case, but then he added, "he shall surely die." Hazael's presence before Elisha was a reminder of Elisha's calling many years earlier. Elijah, in declaring Elisha to be his successor, had declared that Elisha would appoint Hazael to rule Syria and to bring judgment on Israel. Now Elisha had before him a man who was preparing to seize the throne, the Hazael whom Elijah had predicted would do so.

Hazael was then told what he would do to Israel: burn its strongholds, kill its youth, dash out the brains of small children, and rip open pregnant women.

It was now Hazael's turn to react with horror: "But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" There is no reason to doubt Hazael's sincerity in this answer. He was a cultured gentleman of the court, not a hoodlum or a criminal. Hazael's indignation was real, but he did not know himself. Only in the Lord do we know ourselves as sinners, and our great capacity for self-justification.

Hazael's self-justification was an easy one. *First*, Syria faced a great foreign threat, Assyria. Sooner or later, the terrifying Assyrian advance would be resumed, and Syria's life would be threatened. *Second*, Syria had a very sick king who held all the power, but was incompetent in that, in his illness, he could

neither rule effectively nor act militantly. *Third,* given the king's trust in Hazael, it is likely that Hazael was an able and competent man. It was thus easy for Hazael to see that, logically, Syria "needed" him. To kill a trusting king was a sad act, but for Hazael the circumstances made it the lesser of evils.

Scripture, however, does not affirm man's reasoning or logic. Our motives can be most suspect when we believe that they are most noble, if we are not in obedience to God's law-word. The Bible declares, *first* of all, that we are sinners, that "There is none righteous, no, not one. ...For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:10, 23). *Second,* we are not sinners in any abstract sense; we are sinners because we are rebels against God and His word. The Tempter's words of cynicism concerning God's law echo in the heart of all Adam's seed: "Yea, hath God said?" (Gen. 3:1). *Third,* we are would-be gods and law-makers who seek to deify ourselves and our will as law (Gen. 3:5).

Hazael used a wet blanket to suffocate the king. It left no visible mark and made the king's death seem to be the result of natural causes. With this step, Hazael entered the world of expediency. The fundamental law of Rome, from its earliest days, was this: "The welfare of the people is the highest law." What constituted the public welfare was something which the rulers alone determined. In terms of this, in time, no evil became impossible for the Roman state, and one evil after another was seen as a virtue and a higher law.

This was true of Hazael. Note the crimes predicted by Elisha. *First,* Elisha said that Hazael would murder the king. This meant control of Syria. *Second,* he would destroy Israel's strongholds, apparently all those aimed at protection against Syria. Earlier rulers had often sought an alliance; now Hazael planned a very radical conquest and absorption. *Third,* the young men of Israel would be executed. This would eliminate an Israelite military class in order to prevent any future rebellion. The country would then be left with only old men, old women, and young girls. *Fourth,* women who were pregnant would be ripped open to kill them and any possible

sons. This would leave the non-pregnant women "free" to be taken by Syrians to breed more Syrians. Step by step, in terms of national defense and a pragmatic perspective, Hazael became the very dog or monster he had despised.

Without the fixed limits of God's law, expediency and pragmatism will govern men and lead them from evil to evil.

We either grow from strength to strength in the Lord, or, by compromise with our reasoning and logic, we become that which we may have once despised and called debased. If we are not the servants of God who believe and obey His every law-word, we become our own law-makers, justifying one evil after another in terms of expediency.

Why did Elisha say what he did? Did he give Hazael ideas? The fact is that Hazael came to Elisha with his plan in mind; it was executed on the following day at an opportune moment. Elisha spoke to bring self-realization to Hazael. As the years passed, with each step Hazael took, his own words to Elisha were in his memory to haunt him: "Is thy servant a dog?"

This remark can only be appreciated if we understand the place of dogs in his day. Dogs were the scavengers of the cities. Among other things, they were the ready consumers of feces, thereby cleaning up the walled city. Until the communist-created famines led to the eating of family dogs in China, one of the functions of the dog was to be called to wipe a baby's buttocks clean by eating and licking up the feces. According to an American doctor's statement to me, because a dog's tongue is one of the cleanest things in nature, no Chinese babies had buttock rashes or infections.

This was what dogs were as Hazael and Elisha knew them, not house pets but scavengers and feces-eaters. Hence Hazael's shocked words, "Is thy servant a dog?"

Events were to prove what he was, and he himself, not Elisha, had best described himself. We can understand, therefore, Elisha's horror, so well conveyed by Moffatt, at what Hazael would become.

Hazael had been ordained by God to judge Israel (1 Kings 19:14-18). Judgment was also to come to Israel from within Israel in the form of Jehu.

Israel, while nominally given to Jehovah-worship, had so compromised it with the religious currents of the time as to make it impotent. More than that, God despised their syncretistic faith and refused to regard it as true religion. Rather, He saw it as offensive and evil, and deserving of very radical judgment. Israel's religion was marked by pragmatism and expediency; it was to be judged by a man who was ruled by the same evil.

Chapter 25

Jehu and Jezebel

16. And in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being then king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign.
17. Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem.
18. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab: for the daughter of Ahab was his wife: and he did evil in the sight of the LORD.
19. Yet the LORD would not destroy Judah for David his servant's sake, as he promised him to give him alway a light, and to his children.
20. In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves.
21. So Joram went over to Zair, and all the chariots with him: and he rose by night, and smote the Edomites which compassed him about, and the captains of the chariots: and the people fled into their tents.
22. Yet Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time.
23. And the rest of the acts of Joram, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?
24. And Joram slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead.
25. In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel did Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah begin to reign.
26. Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign; and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Athaliah, the daughter of Omri king of Israel.
27. And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the LORD, as did the house of Ahab: for he was the son in law of the house of Ahab.
28. And he went with Joram the son of Ahab to the war against Hazael king of Syria in Ramoth-gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram.

29. And king Joram went back to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick.
(2 Kings 8:16-29)

1. And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramothgilead:
2. And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber;
3. Then take the box of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith the LORD, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not.
4. So the young man, even the young man the prophet, went to Ramothgilead.
5. And when he came, behold, the captains of the host were sitting; and he said, I have an errand to thee, O captain. And Jehu said, Unto which of all us? And he said, To thee, O captain.
6. And he arose, and went into the house; and he poured the oil on his head, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of the LORD, even over Israel.
7. And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel.
8. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish: and I will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel:
9. And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah:
10. And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her. And he opened the door, and fled.
11. Then Jehu came forth to the servants of his lord: and one said unto him, Is all well? wherefore came this mad

fellow to thee? And he said unto them, Ye know the man, and his communication.
12. And they said, It is false; tell us now. And he said, Thus and thus spake he to me, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I have anointed thee king over Israel.
13. Then they hasted, and took every man his garment, and put it under him on the top of the stairs, and blew with trumpets, saying, Jehu is king.
14. So Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi conspired against Joram. (Now Joram had kept Ramothgilead, he and all Israel, because of Hazael king of Syria.
15. But king Joram was returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him, when he fought with Hazael king of Syria.) And Jehu said, If it be your minds, then let none go forth nor escape out of the city to go to tell it in Jezreel.
16. So Jehu rode in a chariot, and went to Jezreel; for Joram lay there. And Ahaziah king of Judah was come down to see Joram.
7. And there stood a watchman on the tower in Jezreel, and he spied the company of Jehu as he came, and said, I see a company. And Joram said, Take an horseman, and send to meet them, and let him say, Is it peace?
18. So there went one on horseback to meet him, and said, Thus saith the king, Is it peace? And Jehu said, What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me. And the watchman told, saying, The messenger came to them, but he cometh not again.
19. Then he sent out a second on horseback, which came to them, and said, Thus saith the king, Is it peace? And Jehu answered, What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me.
20. And the watchman told, saying, He came even unto them, and cometh not again: and the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously.
21. And Joram said, Make ready. And his chariot was made ready. And Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, and they went out against Jehu, and met him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite.
22. And it came to pass, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, Is it peace, Jehu? And he answered, What peace, so

long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?
23. And Joram turned his hands, and fled, and said to Ahaziah, There is treachery, O Ahaziah.
24. And Jehu drew a bow with his full strength, and smote Jehoram between his arms, and the arrow went out at his heart, and he sunk down in his chariot.
25. Then said Jehu to Bidkar his captain, Take up, and cast him in the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite: for remember how that, when I and thou rode together after Ahab his father, the LORD laid this burden upon him;
26. Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, saith the LORD; and I will requite thee in this plat, saith the LORD. Now therefore take and cast him into the plat of ground, according to the word of the LORD.
27. But when Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this, he fled by the way of the garden house. And Jehu followed after him, and said, Smite him also in the chariot. And they did so at the going up to Gur, which is by Ibleam. And he fled to Megiddo, and died there.
28. And his servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his sepulchre with his fathers in the city of David.
29. And in the eleventh year of Joram the son of Ahab began Ahaziah to reign over Judah.
30. And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window.
31. And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?
32. And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who is on my side? who? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs.
33. And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot.
34. And when he was come in, he did eat and drink, and said, Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a king's daughter.
35. And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands.

36. Wherefore they came again, and told him. And he said, This is the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel:
37. And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel. (2 Kings 9:1-37)

1. And Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. And Jehu wrote letters, and sent to Samaria, unto the rulers of Jezreel, to the elders, and to them that brought up Ahab's children, saying,
2. Now as soon as this letter cometh to you, seeing your master's sons are with you, and there are with you chariots and horses, a fenced city also, and armour;
3. Look even out the best and meetest of your master's sons, and set him on his father's throne, and fight for your master's house.
4. But they were exceedingly afraid, and said, Behold, two kings stood not before him: how then shall we stand?
5. And he that was over the house, and he that was over the city, the elders also, and the bringers up of the children, sent to Jehu, saying, We are thy servants, and will do all that thou shalt bid us; we will not make any king: do thou that which is good in thine eyes.
6. Then he wrote a letter the second time to them, saying, If ye be mine, and if ye will hearken unto my voice, take ye the heads of the men your master's sons, and come to me to Jezreel by to morrow this time. Now the king's sons, being seventy persons, were with the great men of the city, which brought them up.
7. And it came to pass, when the letter came to them, that they took the king's sons, and slew seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent him them to Jezreel.
8. And there came a messenger, and told him, saying, They have brought the heads of the king's sons. And he said, Lay ye them in two heaps at the entering in of the gate until the morning.
9. And it came to pass in the morning, that he went out, and stood, and said to all the people, Ye be righteous: behold, I conspired against my master, and slew him: but who slew all these?

10. Know now that there shall fall unto the earth nothing of the word of the LORD, which the LORD spake concerning the house of Ahab: for the LORD hath done that which he spake by his servant Elijah.
11. So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining.
12. And he arose and departed, and came to Samaria. And as he was at the shearing house in the way,
13. Jehu met with the brethren of Ahaziah king of Judah, and said, Who are ye? And they answered, We are the brethren of Ahaziah; and we go down to salute the children of the king and the children of the queen.
14. And he said, Take them alive. And they took them alive, and slew them at the pit of the shearing house, even two and forty men; neither left he any of them.
15. And when he was departed thence, he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him: and he saluted him, and said to him, Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give me thine hand. And he gave him his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot.
16. And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD. So they made him ride in his chariot.
17. And when he came to Samaria, he slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed him, according to the saying of the LORD, which he spake to Elijah.
18. And Jehu gathered all the people together, and said unto them, Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much.
19. Now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests; let none be wanting: for I have a great sacrifice to do to Baal; whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live. But Jehu did it in subtilty, to the intent that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal.
20. And Jehu said, Proclaim a solemn assembly for Baal. And they proclaimed it.
21. And Jehu sent through all Israel: and all the worshippers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left that came not. And they came into the house of Baal; and the house of Baal was full from one end to another.

22. And he said unto him that was over the vestry, Bring forth vestments for all the worshippers of Baal. And he brought them forth vestments.
23. And Jehu went, and Jehonadab the son of Rechab, into the house of Baal, and said unto the worshippers of Baal, Search, and look that there be here with you none of the servants of the LORD, but the worshippers of Baal only.
24. And when they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings, Jehu appointed fourscore men without, and said, If any of the men whom I have brought into your hands escape, he that letteth him go, his life shall be for the life of him.
25. And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, that Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, Go in, and slay them; let none come forth. And they smote them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the captains cast them out, and went to the city of the house of Baal.
26. And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burned them.
27. And they brake down the image of Baal, and brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house unto this day.
28. Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel.
29. Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan.
30. And the LORD said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.
31. But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.
32. In those days the LORD began to cut Israel short: and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel;
33. From Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan.

> 34. Now the rest of the acts of Jehu, and all that he did, and all his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?
> 35. And Jehu slept with his fathers: and they buried him in Samaria. And Jehoahaz his son reigned in his stead.
> 36. And the time that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty and eight years. (2 Kings 10:1-36)

When Elisha was called by God through Elijah, one of his future tasks was to 'anoint' Jehu to be king over Israel. This, like the calling of Hazael, was a judgment on Israel, not a step in its redemption (1 Kings 19:15-17). The people would learn nothing from God's judgments.

Now, many years later, the time had come for Jehu's anointing and rule. At the same time, Ahab's seed ruled in Judah also, because its king, Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, was married to a daughter of Ahab (2 Kings 8:16-18). Both Edom and Libnah revolted against Judah, so that Jehoram's son Ahaziah inherited a diminished realm. Ahaziah ruled only one year, walking "in the ways of the house of Ahab" (2 Chron. 22:3), and he was then killed by Jehu while visiting his uncle Jehoram, king of Israel (who had the same name as his father). Ahaziah's mother, Ahab's daughter Athaliah, was a particularly evil woman. After her son's murder, to retain power as queen-mother, she destroyed all the royal seed (2 Kings 11:1) and began to reign (c. 842 B.C.). She reigned for six years until the priest Jehoida put the young Joash on the throne, and Athaliah was killed.

We have thus an era of treachery, assassinations, and apostasy. In this situation, Jehu was both a judgment on the house of Ahab and also on Israel.

Elisha sent a young prophet to Ramoth-Gilead to anoint Jehu. Being himself old and infirm, he used a young man. The young man anointed Jehu and set forth the predicted judgment. *First*, the entire house of Ahab would perish, and, like Jeroboam's dynasty, disappear. *Second*, Jezebel, the architect of Ahab's policies, would be eaten by the dogs of Jezreel, with none to bury her. *Third*, while the prophet made

it clear that Jehu was an instrument of judgment, no promises were made to Jehu other than that he would be king (2 Kings 9:1-10). Subsequently, because of the limited good accomplished under Jehu, God gave to Jehu the promise that "thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel" (2 Kings 10:30), despite the fact that Jehu "took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart." In fact, he continued the sins of Jeroboam I, which included the propagation of the golden calf cult (2 Kings 10:29, 31).

Jehu may have been hesitant about doing anything about his anointing as king. However, when Jehu came out of the house, his officers asked what "this mad fellow," *i.e.*, the prophet, had to say. Jehu at first brushed off the question with the statement, "You know the man, and his communication" (2 Kings 9:11). Perhaps because the officers saw the oil of anointing still on Jehu's head, they bluntly accused him of lying. Jehu then told the truth; the men received it joyfully and proclaimed him king. Jehu and a company of men set out immediately for Jezreel, where kings Joram and Ahaziah were staying. Concerned about their coming, but apparently wondering if there were news of Syrian plans, the two kings rode out to meet the fast-driving Jehu. Both were killed. Joram's (or, Jehoram's) body was thrown into the field of Naboth the Jezreelite by way of vengeance.

Word of this revolution reached Jezebel. She prepared herself for death, and, finely dressed, greeted Jehu from a high window. She reminded him of the brief reign of the usurper Zemiri. Jehu ordered the eunuchs to throw Jezebel out the window to her death, which they did. Later, when the dogs finished with her, only her skull, feet, and hands remained (2 Kings 9:30-37).

Jehu then ordered the death in Samaria of Ahab's "seventy sons." This number has reference to the national council of elders; later, the Sanhedrin was made up of the same number. Ahab's sons (and, possibly, grandsons and other close male relatives) made up the ruling elite of Israel. Under pressure

from Jehu, the elders of the cities of Jezreel and Samaria killed all these male seed of Ahab and sent their heads to Jehu (2 Kings 10:1-11). Then the brothers of Ahaziah of Judah were also killed, forty-two men (2 Kings 10:12-14). A little later, Jehu, pretending to be a devout follower of Baal, gathered together "all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests" for a great celebration, only to execute them to the last man (2 Kings 10:18-28), thereby destroying Baalism in Israel.

In this respect, Jehu executed God's judgment. At the same time, all this represented, as God knew, only a conservative reaction, not a reformation or renewal. Jehu destroyed the new Baalism in favor of the older syncretism of the golden calf cult, a fertility religion. This cult had roots in Israel going back to Jeroboam I, and, before him, to the apostasy in Sinai. Jehu represented a conservative reaction, not a godly reformation. That there was a measure of good to this, God acknowledged (2 Kings 10:29-31), but God also judged Jehu more severely for his apostasy, in that, during Jehu's reign, there was a serious loss of territory. Moreover, we are plainly told that "the LORD began to cut Israel short" (2 Kings 10:32-33). Jehu was thus not given the limited measure of success that marked Ahab's reign. All of Israel's territories east of the Jordan River were overrun by Hazael. Jehu's submission to Shalmaneser III is recorded by history, though it is not in the Bible, but it was apparently occasioned by Syria's threat. An Assyrian connection against Syria was hardly a triumph, particularly because it required a submission to Assyria. The lost territories were later recovered by Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25, 28).

God had ordained the fall and death of Ahab's line, but this does not mean His approval of the means. Jehu was a judgment, as we have seen, on Ahab's dynasty, and on Israel, and, as such, was himself a part of an evil nation. In Hosea 1:4, God declares, "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu."

Jehu could have abolished the golden calf cult and re-established the pure worship of Jehovah. Had he done so, the Temple in Jerusalem would again be central to worship, and

the division of the country endangered. Since Jehu had killed the kings of both Judah and Israel, it was a singularly good occasion to reunite the two realms. This Jehu had no desire to do, since he was not of the Davidic line, and only a descendent of the house of David could rule from Jerusalem. Jehu had no desire to step aside for a Davidic king.

Moreover, although Jehu gained the impetus to power from Elisha's school of prophets, he made no attempt to recognize the prophets, nor to heed them. The truth of these prophets was an uncompromising one, whereas Jehu's faith was a compromising one. Instead of the prophets, Jehu turned to the Rechabites, traditionalists. The Rechabites were ready to agree with Jehu's bloodletting (2 Kings 10:15-25) and took part in it. Their idea of national renewal was to kill off the Baal worshippers, not to convert the peoples. The Rechabites were good people, but the essence of their faith was to *avoid* the world, not to *convert* it. Accordingly, they could only approach it destructively.

The bloodletting eliminated one set of evil men only to replace them with another. It destroyed one bad religion in order to reinstate another which was equally bad.

Jezebel, a thorough pragmatist, was perceptive at the moment of death. She saw that violence breeds violence. While she may have rested previously in the claimed legitimacy of Ahab's line, the house of Omri, she knew at the last that Elijah the prophet had spoken the truth. She had seen Elijah's word fulfilled in her husband's death (1 Kings 21:19, 22:37-38). Elijah's prophetic word from the LORD concerning Jezebel had been, "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel" (1 Kings 21:23). Jezebel had always hated Elijah and sought his death (1 Kings 19:1-3). This prediction could not have endeared Elijah to her. Now, at the end, she must have remembered Elijah's words as she went proudly to her death. Her pride remains on paper, in the Bible, and her soul in hell. Baalism, the worship of power, was her creed, and she was faithful to it to the very end.

It was fitting that Jehu was her executioner. Although he was a man who knew the truth of God, he was, like her, more in love with power than with the future of Israel under God. The reunion of Israel and Judah at that opportune moment was never a consideration for him.

As against these two, we have the Rechabites, good people, but essentially useless. To avoid the world is to compromise with it. To leave politics to the professionals is to deny an obligation to apply God's word to every area of life and thought.

Chapter 26
The Fear of Victory

14. Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.
15. And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows.
16. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands.
17. And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the LORD'S deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them.
18. And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed.
19. And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.
20. And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year.
21. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet. (2 Kings 13:14-21)

Elisha, on his deathbed, is visited by the young king, Joash. For sixty three years, Elisha had been the great prophet in and to Israel. Joash thus went further than other kings of Israel in visiting the dying man; prophets had not been popular with the monarchs, who regarded them as dangerous meddlers. Joash, however, pays a very fine and accurate tribute to Elisha: he calls him "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof," and father-protector to the realm. Elisha is thus declared to be

the true national defense of the kingdom. Joash knew the truth; his problem was his unwillingness to live in terms of it.

Elisha ordered Joash to take a bow and arrows and stand at an open east window. Elisha then placed his hands on the king's hands, thereby making it clear that the king's war against Syria was the prophet's and God's war. Elisha made it very clear to Joash what all this meant. Joash would have victory in a forthcoming battle: "The arrow of the LORD's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them" (v. 17).

Elisha then ordered Joash to take the arrows and, either by bow or by hand, drive them into the ground outside the door. Elisha's clear intent is, *first*, that the whole quiver of arrows be used; he does not limit the number. His order is to drive the "arrows" into the ground. Like Ahab before him, Joash was unwilling to destroy Syria for fear of Assyria. He preferred to keep an enemy state alive as a buffer against the Assyrian Empire. This, the policy of Omir's dynasty, was now also the policy of the House of Jehu. Joash preferred fighting Syria to unswerving obedience to God. He was afraid of victory, because victory would lead to great responsibilities.

The fear of victory is not unusual. Doctors are plagued with healthy people with imaginary ailments; others who do not go to doctors are always complaining about not feeling well, although they are as healthy as an ox. They fear health, because it brings them face-to-face with their responsibilities as men and women. In one way or another, countless people cripple themselves either physically or spiritually to avoid meeting life victoriously. The responsibilities of success and victory are avoided by many.

For Joash, the fullness of victory required a fullness of surrender and truth in the Lord, and *obedience.* Men are afraid to trust God wholly, because they know God requires all of them. For them, to be totally faithful to the Lord is defeat for the self; it means that they are no longer captains of their souls

and masters of their fates. God, then, becomes their lord. Men prefer their sovereignty to God's sovereignty. This was the case with Joash.

We are told that Joash did indeed defeat Syria three times, but no more (2 Kings 13:25).

Elisha died and was buried. In the next year, a Moabite invasion took place. One of the Moabites was killed in action. As his burial was in progress, the Moabites found it necessary to face an Israelite detachment. The dead Moabite was hastily dropped into Elisha's sepulcher. When his body touched the bones of Elisha, the man regained life and joined his fellow soldiers. This miracle came to be know in Israel as well as in Moab.

Here, late in the day, God still offers Joash victory. The miracle witnesses to the fact that the power of the God of Elisha is still available, if Joash repents.

This miracle of Elisha's bones is important in Church history because of its part in the veneration of relics. Very early, the Church gave high place to the relics of saints and martyrs. In assessing this practice, two separate questions need to be answered. *First*, what is the source of the veneration of relics? Is it, rightly or wrongly, based on something in the Bible, or is it pagan? It is easy, and misleading, to find pagan analogies to many practices. Thus, all too many Christians are convinced that Christmas trees are pagan in origin. It is clear that the worship of trees is to be found in many pagan cultures, but this means nothing; marriage is also found in many cultures, but this does not invalidate marriage. The Christmas tree was plainly the tree of life, Jesus Christ (Gen. 2:9; Rev. 22:2; etc.), and, until this generation, the ornaments represented fruit borne by that tree.

Similarly, the veneration of relics is modeled upon the miracle proceeding from the bones of Elisha. Christians, from the beginning, showed greater care for their dead than did members of other religions, by and large, because of their resurrection faith. This meant a respect for all the Christian

dead, and especially saints and martyrs. There was no paganism in any of this, any more than with us, if we treasure a gift from a departed family member, or a letter from some great Christian. The pagan analogies are there, but they are meaningless. Some people prize mementos of Elvis Presley; does this mean we are influenced by him and his wretched life and music, if we in turn treasure some memento of a great Christian? The source of the practice for the Church was the bones of Elisha, and, the normal sense of family love for the great men and women of our faith.

Second, granted that the *source* of the veneration of relics was Biblical, was the *practice* Biblical? Basic to the practice was the belief that power went out from the great saints of God. It even went out from the border of Christ's garment (Matt. 9:20-22, 14:36). Out of this came the belief that, because God's power was at work in the lives of His saints, power could still go forth from their bones and relics. A subordinate aspect of this belief was the feeling that there was virtue and continuity in having relics in a church. The frauds, of course, were numerous, and the reformers, both Protestant and Catholic, ridiculed the many absurdities that existed. However, we must recognize that it was not an innovating spirit which led to the veneration of relics, but a very conspicuously conservative temper. Innovations were distrusted, and a local church's "need" for relics was to bind itself to the Church of the ages, and the saints of Scripture.

This belief in the power of God manifest in the past led to absurdities in the veneration of the past and its relics. The Protestant form of this veneration of the past has been the idealization of the early Church, which was not lacking in sinners and problems, as well as its saints. The *practice* thus went beyond Scripture; it limited the vision of men too much to the past and too little to the present and future.

Relics and their veneration, as well as the veneration of the early Church, have thrived because of faulty eschatologies. If the greatness of Christ's work is seen as a past event, we will venerate the past. If we see "greater works" as ahead of us (John

14:12), then we will work expectantly, confident that the splendor of God's power has not yet been made fully manifest, but shall be. Thus, a postmillennial perspective is the Biblical remedy for this orientation on the past.

The veneration of the past is an aspect of the fear of victory.

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Rousas John Rushdoony (1916-2001) was a well-known American scholar, writer, and author of over thirty books. He held B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of California and received his theological training at the Pacific School of Religion. An ordained minister, he worked as a missionary among Paiute and Shoshone Indians as well as a pastor to two California churches. He founded the Chalcedon Foundation, an educational organization devoted to research, publishing, and cogent communication of a distinctively Christian scholarship to the world at large. His writing in the *Chalcedon Report* and his numerous books spawned a generation of believers active in reconstructing the world to the glory of Jesus Christ. He resided in Vallecito, California until his death, where he engaged in research, lecturing, and assisting others in developing programs to put the Christian Faith into action.

CHARIOTS OF PROPHETIC FIRE

STUDIES IN ELIJAH AND ELISHA

There is a marked resemblance between our time and that of Elijah and Elisha. Theirs was a time of judgment; ours is as well. But there is a deeper resemblance. Their day was an age of syncretism, of radical compromise between the worship of the Lord and Baal worship. The two had been blended together to make one religion, so that a refusal to see the necessity for uncompromising religion marked Israel.

Israel rarely denied the Lord or professed open apostasy. Rather, it pursued a course of religious syncretism, using the name of the Lord but absorbing with their religion whatever other faith was expedient for them. Thus, they were not open pagans, but pagans who practiced their unbelief under cover of the Lord's name.

Syncretism is again our problem. Numerous forces, powers, and persons are accorded sovereignty over man. Today, Baal-worship is again prevalent in the name of the Lord. Humanistic statism is easily and readily submitted to by churchmen: children are placed in humanistic state schools, given into the hands of the enemies of God, and people are only indignant if you condemn this practice. The major concern of most church members is not the Lord's battles, nor the urgency to make a stand against compromise, but, "How can I best enjoy life?"

The similarity does not end there. Elijah and Elisha's day was one of prosperity, a false prosperity that was largely the product of inflation. Our age, too, has been marked by an inflationary prosperity, and the loosening of moral and religious standards is one result. People want things, not qualities or virtues. This mindset demands more material wealth for men and diminishes the need for moral and educational performance and excellence. It is now a virtue to tolerate evil and to be intolerant of any material lack for man.

In *Chariots of Prophetic Fire*, R.J. Rushdoony challenges the Church of our day to resist compromise and the temptation of expediency, and realize that the power today does not lie in politics or governments but in God's men of faith.

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